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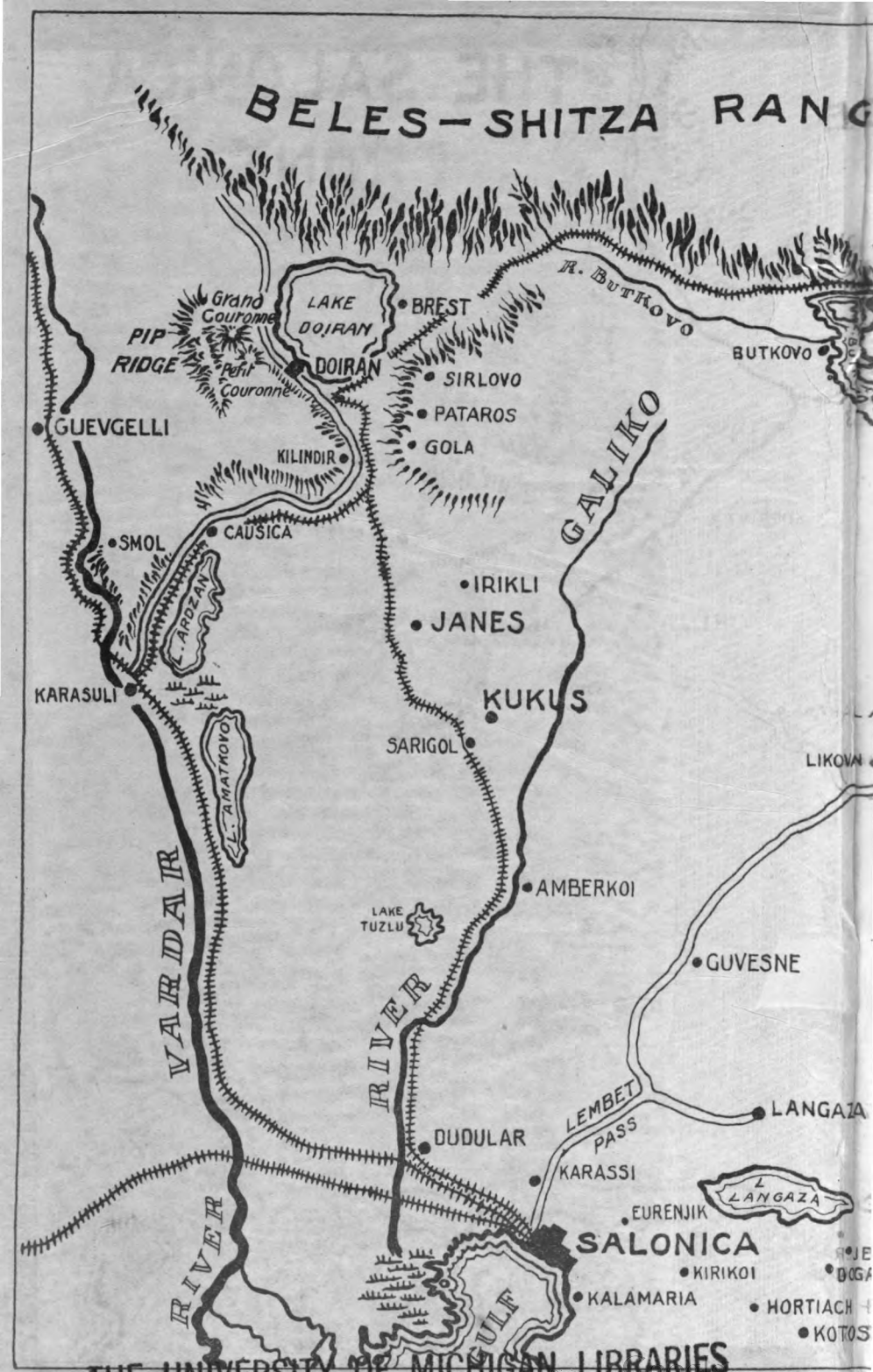

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MACEDONIAN MEMORIES

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THE AUTHOR

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MACEDONIAN MEMORIES

BY

HENRY C. DAY, S.J., H.C.F., M.C.

(Order of the White Eagle of Serbia)

AUTHOR OF

"A CAVALRY CHAPLAIN," ETC.

WITH A PREFACE BY

FIELD-MARSHAL SIR GEORGE F. MILNE,

G.C.B., G.C.M.G., D.S.O., D.C.L., LL.D.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

FRED A. FARRELL

Official Artist with the 51st (Highland) Division

HEATH CRANTON LIMITED

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PREFACE

THE author (a Cavalry Chaplain) requires no introduction to the members of the Salonika Army, and this second instalment of his reminiscences will recall many scenes and persons now almost forgotten. It will also teach them, as it did me, a good deal about the history of Macedonia and its people.

After the recent flood of somewhat unpleasant war literature, mostly from "the other side of the line," the general public will no doubt turn with relief to a book such as this, which looks upon war in the healthy British way. It often appears as if the authors of many of our war books were either temperamentally unfit for active service from the beginning, or else returned in a state which rendered them unfit to write about it. Padre Day is not one of these.

I am very glad to have the opportunity of welcoming a book of such sturdy character, one which will help towards the long delayed recognition, by the general public, of the work done by the British rank and file in Macedonia.

G. F. MILNE, F.M.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

"MACEDONIAN Memories" is a continuation of the story of "A Cavalry Chaplain", published eight years ago, by Messrs. Heath Cranton Limited, and resumed at their request from the days succeeding Gallipoli. The narrative, accordingly, opens with my arrival in Salonika, and closes with the last days of the "Hundred Days Battle" in France, known at the period as Armageddon.

The bulk of Chapter I is taken up with a general historical and political sketch of the Balkans. It also contains a detailed account of Macedonia, a country which is likely to loom large in future discussions of the Great War and its causes.

In the short Preface, kindly contributed by Field-Marshal Sir George Milne, he disparages the tone of some recent war books, which, while pretending to be realistic, give a distorted idea of the nature of war, and are calculated to deter the new generation from embarking upon it, even should the necessity arise. I have read more than one of these books, and am fully satisfied of the justice of the Field-Marshal's strictures.

The work of the creative artist, whether painter or poet or prose writer, who sets out to depict reality, is not to put on canvas or paper mere crude realities discerned by sight or hearing; but to give truthful expression to these realities, after they have passed through the medium of his own mind, and been changed into spiritual conceptions and emotions by the process.

In proportion to the skill of the artist, in setting forth his impressions, they will embody more or less of truth—which is only another name for reality. Where mastery of form is combined with intellectual genius, the result will be exquisite as well as true, and stand for all time as a classic. But the real reality is the true picture which God sees, or the exemplar as it originally existed in the Divine Knowledge and Wisdom. This is the ultimate

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criterion of all art and science. But since this absolute ideal transcends time and space, and exists in the purely spiritual plane, human art and knowledge can only hope to approach it more or less remotely.

War is an outcome of the law of strife and progress impressed on our nature by its Creator, and permitted in certain circumstances for the achievement of beneficent ends. How far these ends of Divine Providence were fulfilled in the Great War of 1914-1918 it would be presumptuous on our part to decide. The proper attitude should be that of hope; and though we naturally hold suffering and sorrow, bloodshed and death in abhorrence, this sentiment should not blind us to the fact that the physical phenomena of war are neither more nor less than signs or shadows of abiding moral and spiritual realities, whether good or bad.

As Christians, moreover, we must recognize the Providential function of suffering on earth; and we should never lose sight of the fact that the battle of our Redemption was fought and won on the Cross.

My own account in these pages, however inadequate, is at least a truthful expression of my mind, and grounded on real facts which I witnessed.

In compiling this book, I have received invaluable help and encouragement from friends, which it is a pleasure for me to acknowledge. Most of all, I am indebted to Captain A. O. Morris, late R.G.A., who generously devoted his time and talent to revising and correcting my copy. To Lieutenant-Colonel C. E. P. Sankey, D.S.O., late C.R.E. of the 1st Infantry Division in France, I am also obliged for carefully revising the last chapter. Mr. F. A. Farrell, the artist, has done invaluable work by designing the maps and illustrations. To Father R. H. J. Steuart, S.J., I wish also to offer my sincere thanks for allowing me to insert in my last chapter his deeply touching and beautifully written account of the death of a deserter.

HENRY C. DAY, S.J.

CAMPION HOUSE,
OSTERLEY, MIDDLESEX.

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CHAPTER I

Bonjour, Salonique!—The Holy Synod of Athos—Thessalonica—Macedonia — The Republic of Venice — Independence of the Balkan States—The Young Turks Party—The two Balkan wars—Causes of the Great European War—Importance of the Suez Canal—Heroic Serbian retreat.

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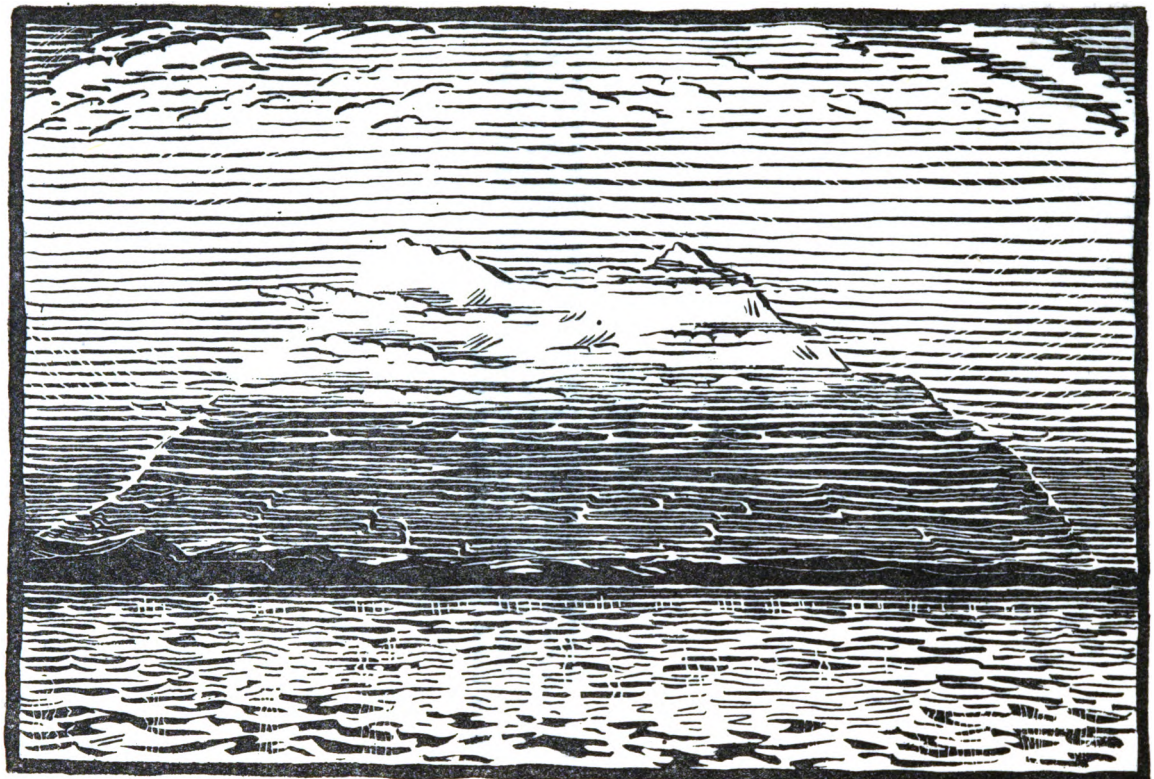

DAWN ON OLYMPUS.

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CHAPTER I

At dawn on Friday, March 3rd, 1916, we entered the Gulf of Salonika, or Therma; as we steamed up the broad and long channel that formerly divided ancient Greece on the West from her colonies on the Chalcidice promontory to the East, many wonders of the past presented themselves. To the left loomed mighty Olympus, the famous mountain of heaven. First the green slopes of the Elysian fields, then the snow-capped summit guarded by fleecy clouds, came into view. Beneath that spacious dome once dwelt the gods of Homer.

Opposite, with its contrasted aura of modern Greek-Orthodox piety, lay Mount Athos, also called Hagion Oros, or the Holy Hill from the famous religious settlement in its neighbourhood. This dominating height is situated a mile or two back from the farthest point of the three tongues of land forming the promontory; though in fact it is made up of several widely separated ascending ridges, it appears in the distance as a solitary peak, sheer above the sea. The summit, crowned with a huge slab of white marble, attains an altitude of more than six thousand feet.

Beneath Mount Athos, and co-extensive with the peninsula named after it, is the ancient religious settlement of more than twenty thousand monks, divided between twenty large monasteries and a number of scattered hermitages. The whole strip of territory, roughly about two hundred square miles, belongs to the religious community, who long ago constituted it into a small autonomous republic on strictly democratic lines. The government, in accordance with the original constitution, continues in the hands of four presidents, who are themselves controlled and guided by a representative body of twenty elected members, one from each monastery. The chief of the four presidents is called " The First Man of Athos ". The assembly is known as the Holy Synod.

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The religious discipline of the community rests on the rule of St. Basil, rigorously interpreted, especially in the matter of celibacy. So strictly is the rule in this respect interpreted that no women, under any pretext whatever, are allowed to enter the Peninsula—even the presence of female animals is prohibited. The number of monks who inhabit the Holy Hill is about six thousand.

At any time the passage between these classic haunts of the old gods of heathendom is calculated to arouse long-buried memories of ancient mythology. But in the present circumstances—with the sun chasing fugitive shadows across mountains and valleys, rolling back grey mists to reveal hidden wonders, spreading carpets of purple and blue over land and sea—the re-awakened memories became startlingly vivid and compelling. Resist as you might, the magic worked. Nymphs, fauns, Delphic oracles, groves of Daphne, all materialized. In fact the old superstitions lived again.

Well before the breakfast hour we had nearly reached the head of the Gulf, and were in full view of the harbour and city of Salonika. This town, though little known to English people before the war, is one of the principal seaports of South-Eastern Europe, and has a long and troubled political history which more than justifies the title given to it, by its modern French historian, of " La Ville Convoitée ", or " The Coveted City ".

The story of the trouble begins as far back as 315 B.C. when the Greek General Cassander, a former trusted officer of Alexander the Great, to whose sister Thessala he was married, over-ran and devastated much of his brother-in-law's territory. Having thus far succeeded in carving out for himself a kingdom, he had next to provide a capital, as well as a home for the dispossessed populations. To meet this double purpose, the new King selected an ancient village, situated near the mouth of the present River Vardar. This village, called Therma from the thermal springs of the district, soon grew into a city, which he named Thessalonica in honour of his wife, Thessala, and in memory of the victory, " nike," he had

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won over her brother, the renowned conqueror and emperor of Macedonia.

At once the poor homeless people from the neighbouring townships flocked to it as to a refuge, and the city steadily increased in importance, until in time it became the cynosure of many distant nations and peoples, who have since fought and struggled through the ages to gain or regain control and ownership of it.

The first Kings of Thessalonica, after the death of Cassander, were Græco-Macedonian monarchs who had succeeded to a share of Alexander's former vast empire. These native rulers held the city against all foreign rivals for more than a century and a half.

At length, with the gradual absorption of Greece by Rome, Macedonia became a Roman province, and Thessalonica was made its capital. This change occurred as an immediate result of the famous battle of Pydna in 168 B.C. For many centuries after, the city remained in the hands of the Romans, and at the time of the visit of St. Paul, it was both the capital of the province of Macedonia, and an important "free city" ruled by a popular assembly and magistrates. These were the happy days of the "Pax Romana"—a period of peace and tranquillity lasting on well into the fourth century. Then with the decline of the Roman power, Thessalonica, like other parts of the Empire, fell a prey to attacks from within and from without; until after a decade of centuries, it shared the fate of the Eastern or Byzantine Empire, to which it now belonged, and succumbed to the rule of the Turks.

Of the barbaric tribes who came in waves from the north of the Danube and devastated Europe in the fifth century, countless thousands swept through the Balkan Peninsula, spreading northward into Central Germany and westward to the Adriatic. Only two families, however, of these wild peoples, the Slavs from the Russia of to-day and the Bulgars from more distant lands, remained to form permanent settlements in the country.

The Slavs were a peaceful agricultural people, living

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in large family communities, and owning no permanent chief. From them have come the nations of the Croats, Slovenes, and Dalmatians, who have recently united with their kinsfolk of Montenegro and Serbia to constitute Yugo-Slavia, or the country of the Southern Slavs. The Bulgars, racially akin to Huns, Turks, Magyars and Finns, were on the contrary a warlike people, who already boasted a standing army and the rule of a Czar. The fact that, for all practical purposes, the Bulgars of our time have come to be regarded, and to regard themselves, as members of the Slavonic family, along with their Serbian neighbours, is to be traced to the ninth century, when they became Christians and adopted the Slav language in place of their own. In reality, Bulgars and Serbs, besides being racially distinct, differ widely in all respects of physical appearance and moral character.

These two nations, however, early on sank their differences, and combining forces, gradually extended the borders of their territories, until at times they were rulers of Empires reaching from the Black Sea to the Adriatic. This development naturally led to conflicts with the Macedonians, and between the years 675 and 681 no less than four unsuccessful attempts were made by the Bulgars and Serbs to capture the seaport of Salonika.

The next serious disaster recorded occurred in the year 904, when Arab Corsairs from Syria raided and pillaged the town, and carried off twenty thousand of its inhabitants into captivity. After this, other invaders came to stay for a time; and for the next five hundred years Thessalonica constantly changed hands, becoming the shuttlecock of many warring nations and Empires.

In these vicissitudes of fortune, the inhabitants—whether Latin or Greek, Norman or Lombard, Serb, Bulgar or Turk—were invariably the victims, and often, in defeat, suffered brutal and wholesale massacres.

For many years past the Byzantine Empire in Macedonia had been weakening, while its latest rival, the Ottoman Empire of the Turks in Asia, was preparing to succeed it. The Ottoman—or more properly the Osmanli

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Turks, who derive their name from their first Sultan Osman (1258-1326)—had been forced by the Mongols under Yengkis Khan to migrate from China, and had gradually pushed their way westward, until Osman's successor, Orkhan (1326-59), established his capital opposite Constantinople at Brousa.

In the year 1242, the Greeks who held the city, finding themselves unable to resist the repeated attacks that were being made at this time by the Turks, sold it to the rich and powerful Republic of Venice, which at once set to work to strengthen the ancient fortifications. To the Venetians of this time we owe the seven towers of the city walls, and the strong White Tower by the edge of the sea.

For the next two centuries, the new rulers were more than a match for the Turks, who now sought another entrance into Europe by way of the Peninsula of Gallipoli. This they captured in 1358, and thus for the first time gained a permanent footing on the continent which they were determined to conquer.

After establishing their power in the immediate district, they moved North, and concentrated on the loosely formed Serbian Empire, which finally collapsed before their arms at the famous battle of Kossovo, on the field of the Blackbirds, June 5th, 1359.

This decisive victory sealed the fate of Macedonia and the Balkans. It was the beginning of the end! On May 1st, 1430, a Turkish fleet under Murad II attacked and captured Thessalonica, which was now occupied by the Turks and incorporated with the rest of Macedonia in their Empire. To their new possession they gave the name of Selanik, a contraction which has survived in the modern Greek Saloniki, the English Salonika, and the French Salonique.

After this last conquest, the city remained with the Turks well into the early years of the present century, when it was used by the Young Turks Party as the headquarters of the Committee of Union and Progress which carried out the revolution of 1908. Before this event, the

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belief, founded on the weakness of Turkey, that the city would ultimately pass under the control of the Central Empires of Germany and Austria-Hungary, or that of one of the Balkan States, gave rise to much political intrigue and led to serious consequences.

Salonika, as we shall now call it, finally conquered, the way lay open to Constantinople, which fell on May 29th, 1453. Then all that was left of the Byzantine Empire passed into the hands of the Turks, and the Ottoman Empire in Europe rose on its ruins. After Serbia and Macedonia, Greece, Rumania and Bulgaria all became subject to Turkey, and for four hundred years suffered constant and cruel persecution.

Only a few Serbs, who escaped to the mountain fastnesses of Montenegro, were able to maintain their liberty. The rest entirely lost their freedom, yet not their sense of individual nationality. To this, as well as to their common religion and language, they clung tenaciously.

This tenacity of purpose stood them in good stead; one by one these subject races gradually recovered, in different ways, their political rights and national status. First, Serbia in 1817, after long unaided struggles against her powerful oppressor, asserted her independence; then four years later, Greece, with the assistance of England and other countries, followed her example. Next, Bulgaria, after the Russo-Turkish war, though still bound to pay tribute to Turkey, was recognized by the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 as a sovereign Principality. The process of emancipation was at length almost complete when Rumania in 1881 became an independent Kingdom.

I have said "almost complete", for Macedonia had yet to be liberated. By the terms of the treaty of 1878, that country, with its two million or more Christian inhabitants, still remained immediately under Turkish rule, subject to a promise of limited control by the Great Powers. But for the conflicting interests of the protectors —Austria-Hungary and Russia, in particular, were known to have special ambitions in respect of the possession of Constantinople and Salonika—the joint control might have

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been helpful to Macedonia and the liberated provinces: in fact it was the reverse. The jealousies, intrigues and quarrels of the Great Powers soon spread to the lesser countries, and led to further dissensions and wars in the Balkan Pensinula. The result for Christian Macedonia was renewed and intensified persecution by its Mohammedan rulers.

In 1885, a brief war occurred between Bulgaria and Serbia; in 1897, difficulties in Crete led to an unsuccessful and disastrous attack on Turkey by Greece. A few years later, in 1903, the Bulgarian population of Macedonia made an heroic but fruitless attempt at insurrection, which was put down by the Turks with ruthless and pitiless cruelty.

Stirred by this last event to a consciousness of their responsibility and obligations, the Great Powers sent political agents, or "officers", as they were called, to Macedonia to supervise the administration of law and justice, and to introduce such reforms as they might deem necessary for the correction of existing abuses, and for the guaranteeing, as far as possible, of peace in the future.

In both respects, unfortunately, the efforts of these officers entirely failed. The attempted reforms, instead of mitigating, rather tended to aggravate the evils they were intended to combat. So far from peace being secured to the country, Macedonia became more than ever the cock-pit for rival armed bands of Greeks, Serbians, Bulgars and Turks, who fought against one another and against the common enemy indifferently.

Matters came to a head in 1908—a year which proved a most eventful one for the Balkans. On July 23rd, the Young Turk Revolution broke out in Salonika, and the Sultan was compelled to re-establish the constitution, and promise a parliament the following day. Abroad, the counterstroke of this revolution was the proclamation by the Austrian Emperor of the definite annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina on the 3rd of October. The same week the Prince of Bulgaria took the title of Czar and proclaimed the sovereign independence of the Kingdom of Bulgaria.

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A little later Austria-Hungary obtained a concession from Turkey to make a railway through the Sanjak of Novi-Bazar. Since Austria was known to have designs on Salonika, and also to resent the presence at the door of her Empire of an independent Serbia, with a population of the same race and language as millions of her own imperial subjects, these moves almost drove Serbia into war. They had also the effect of causing Russia and England to adopt a stricter and more vigilant attitude in regard to matters and events in Macedonia. Germany, all along, as the ally of Turkey, had put obstacles in the way of any real foreign control and reform.

Following these events there was a short period, under the Young Turks' regime, when hopes began to spring up of better things. But the brighter prospect soon passed, and conditions became so grave in Macedonia that the Balkan powers immediately concerned—Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece—joined in an offensive and defensive alliance against the common enemy.

Thus the Balkan Confederacy or Alliance against Turkey was formed, and the First Balkan War (1912-13) opened on October 17th. Montenegro—with whom no formal agreement had been made—a few days previously declared war on Turkey, and was now associated with the Allies. Success at once attended the arms of the smaller nations, and when, on December 4th, an armistice was signed between Turkey, Bulgaria and Serbia, the position was everywhere in favour of the Confederacy. The Greeks, who did not sign the armistice, held Salonika as well as most of Macedonia; the Bulgars on the East had advanced as far as the Chatalja lines, where they found the Turkish Army which they had driven in disorder before them. The Serbians on their side, after heavy fighting in the neighbourhood of Kumanovo and Prilip, had taken Monastir and caused the Turks to retire into Albania in the West.

Next, the signatories of the armistice met in London to arrange the terms of peace; but a *coup d'état* in Constanti-

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nople brought the Young Turks Party back to power, and on February 3rd hostilities were renewed.

Success still continued on the side of the Allies; the Turks, after the surrender of Adrianople on March 25th, again sought the mediation of the Great Powers. As a result, another Conference was convened in London, at the close of which, on May 30th, the delegates were induced to sign a treaty of peace. In accordance with the terms of the new treaty, Turkey surrendered to the Allies all her possessions in Europe, save the narrow strip of territory south of a line from Enos on the Ægean to Midia on the Black Sea, about sixty-three miles from Constantinople. Albania was also granted independence, while Macedonia was divided between Greece and Serbia —Greece being allowed to retain Salonika and the South, the Northern portion being allotted to Serbia.

Unfortunately these successes of the Confederacy were soon marred by quarrels and distrusts amongst the members themselves. The first symptoms of the trouble —which arose chiefly out of the occupation of Macedonia by the Greeks and Serbs, and the setting up of Albania as an independent State—were manifested early in the Conference. As a result, a private Treaty and Convention was signed in Salonika on June 1st, between Greece and Serbia, whereby Greece obliged herself to defend Serbia in case of wanton attack, and also granted her neighbour certain concessions in the Salonika area.

This action of Greece and Serbia was resented by Bulgaria, and matters were brought to a head when, on June 29th, the Fourth Bulgarian Army, acting under orders of a higher political authority, treacherously attacked the former Serb and Greek allies. The Second Balkan War, in which Rumania and Turkey now sided with Greece and Serbia against Bulgaria, immediately followed. The result was that, within a month, Bulgaria was completely defeated, and forced to abandon almost all she had previously won from Turkey.

On August 10th, 1913, the final peace treaty was signed at Bucharest. By this treaty, Adrianople and most of

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her recently lost territory was restored to Turkey, but otherwise the *status quo* of the previous treaty was in the main preserved. Thus the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 resulted in an increase of territory for Serbia and Montenegro of four-fifths, for Bulgaria of one-fifth, and for Greece of almost double her former possessions.

Such was the forced, and therefore unstable condition of affairs in the Balkans at this time. Meanwhile the conviction that Germany and Austria's long-cherished plan of "Weltpolitik" now imperatively demanded the control of the Ægean port, added much to the complexity of the situation, and hastened the outbreak of the Great European War of 1914-1918.

In connection with that world catastrophe, it is significant that the first shots of the war were fired in the small country of Serbia, whose Southern border, with that of Bulgaria, touches the boundary of Macedonia, at a point only sixty miles distant from Salonika.

The circumstances which immediately preceded and occasioned the general conflict are familiar. In June, 1914, the Archduke Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated by two Serbian students in the streets of Serajevo. On the first news of the assassination, the Austro-Hungarian Government, without any preliminary inquiry, sent an ultimatum to Serbia fixing on the country as a whole the full responsibility of the outrage, and demanding immediate satisfaction in terms which involved the honour and independence of the nation.

To this note Serbia, exhausted by previous fighting and disinclined for further warfare, sent a conciliatory reply. Nevertheless Austria, determined to pursue the quarrel she had fixed on her weak neighbour, decided to send a punitive expedition, and declared war against Serbia on July 28th.

In the struggle which ensued, Russia supported Serbia, and Germany upheld Austria. Greece, under King Constantine, the brother-in-law of the German Emperor, despite her obligations to Serbia, and the protests of her Prime Minister, M. Venizelos, declared for neutrality.

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Soon other powers were involved, and warfare on a large scale developed on the Western front, in which Germany, France and England were the chief protagonists.

Meanwhile, in the fighting on the near Eastern front between Austria and Serbia, the first results strangely enough were strikingly in favour of the smaller and weaker nation. Not only did Serbia successfully resist and check the advance of her powerful enemy, but on August 24th, the day after the battle of Le Cateau in France, she actually succeeded in driving the invaders from her own territory, and advanced far into Bosnia. In this battle, which was the first considerable victory won by the Allies, the Austrians lost nearly 40,000 men in killed and wounded, while 4,000 men, 46 field guns, and masses of military equipment and stores were captured by the Serbians.

However, the tide of fortune, now risen in Serbia's favour, was not destined to continue long; in fact, it quickly changed into a contrary flood of misfortune and disaster for the brave little country. First, early in January, 1915, came a terrible epidemic of typhus, which ravaged the length and breadth of the country and practically decimated the Army. Next, after this disastrous visitation, which lasted well into the summer, came a fresh enemy invasion in the autumn.

The renewed attack was made by Austria, in conjunction with Germany, and also with Bulgaria, who, after long hesitation, had at last thrown in her lot with the Central Empires. While Austria and Germany crossed the Danube and attacked from the North, Bulgaria advanced from her Western border, and engaged the Eastern flank of the Serbian Army.

It was at this juncture of affairs, and during the imminence of this fateful invasion, that the Allies, at the invitation of M. Venezelos, decided to send an expeditionary force to Salonika to co-operate with the Serbian army in defence of the invaded country. The objection was at once raised by the enemy countries that Salonika and Macedonia were neutral territory, because Greece,

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to whom they belonged, had declared her neutrality. This objection, however, was ruled out by the Allies, who contended that Greece could not be considered neutral, since she was morally bound to Serbia by the private Treaty which she had signed on June 1st, 1913. The Allies further claimed special legal justification for using Salonika and its railways to assist Serbia, on the ground that, by the Convention in the same Treaty, that country possessed a free zone in the port of Salonika for a period of fifty years, as well as running rights over its railway into Serbian territory.

Practically speaking, the argument amounted to this: Since Greece, notwithstanding her pledge, had failed to help Serbia when wantonly attacked, the Allies were only acting in accordance with their duty to Serbia, and in the spirit of the Serbo-Greek Alliance, when they chose Macedonia as a base of operations, and as a jumping-off place for their troops, in order to help their fellow-belligerent.

The idea of an Expeditionary Force to Salonika had long been mooted by the Allies, though the decision had only been come to at the eleventh hour. France in particular had warmly advocated the scheme as far back as the autumn of 1915, and had set forth arguments which carried much weight at the time, and finally prevailed. There was the evident call of chivalry to succour a small Allied nation in her distress. In addition there were other reasons involving important strategical and political consequences.

In the first place, Serbia must be preserved as a barrier across Germany's direct road to Turkey; otherwise facilities of communication and transport, to the detriment of the Allies, would be given to the Central Powers, and the way to the East would also be open to them.

Next, at all costs Salonika must be occupied, if only to prevent Germany from building another Kiel at the head of the Adriatic. To allow this would have proved fatal! With Salonika at the north of the Gulf and the

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other Greek harbours of the mainland formed into a network of submarine bases by the Central Powers, the Eastern Mediterranean would have fallen, to all intents and purposes, under their complete control; the coasts of North Africa, Italy, and Southern France would have been imperilled. More serious still, the Suez Canal would in all probability have become impossible for naval communication with the East, and the expensive and circuitous route by the Cape of Good Hope would have been the only alternative. This would have put a great strain on our shipping, and caused a serious set-back to the Allied cause. In proportion it would have increased enormously the influence and prestige of the Central Powers.

Apart from these motives put forward by France, England had particular cause for interesting herself in the occupation of Salonika, and in the preservation of Serbia. Since the construction of the Trans-Balkan Railway from Berlin to Baghdad, Egypt and the Suez Canal no longer formed the only route to the East which needed guarding. Macedonia, with its port of Salonika, now offered an alternative way whereby enemy troops could be poured into Asia or North Africa. Consequently, for the protection of British interests in the East, and the safeguarding of the Armies in Egypt and Mesopotamia, it was absolutely necessary that the custody of this gate should be in the hands of the Allies. The preservation of Serbia was a further necessary precaution, especially in view of the future. Indeed in the new circumstances the maintenance of a Slav barrier-state, hereditarily hostile to the Teuton, on the way of any advance of Germany through the Balkans towards India, must for long be a matter of vital importance to the British Empire.

A subsidiary argument for the Expedition—and as events proved, well founded—was the advantage to be gained from the weakening of the enemy's strength in France, if we could hold up large numbers of his troops with relatively small ones of our own in the Balkans.

Hence it was not without reason or justification that

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British and French troops began to arrive at Salonika about this time. On October 5th, General Bailloud's French Division, the 156th, from Helles, and the 10th British, the Irish Division from Suvla, under the command of General Sir Bryan Mahon, landed in the port. A week later, on October 12th, General Sarrail arrived from France to take charge of the expedition, bringing with him the 113th Brigade. This was followed shortly afterwards by two more French Divisions, and a composite Yeomanry Regiment formed of officers and men of my 2nd Mounted Division, summoned from Egypt and Gallipoli.

Although these few and weak troops were the only available forces at the moment, the French Commander-in-Chief decided on making an immediate attempt to rescue the Serbian Army, and to save at least the Southern portion of the country. Accordingly General Bailloud was instructed to advance along the railway up the Vardar valley, and try to join hands with the main Serbian forces at bay in the mountainous district north of the lake and town of Doiran. General Mahon's orders were to follow on with the 10th Division and the Yeomanry as far as the lake, just across the frontier, where the Greek Army was mobilized.

But despite the haste, zeal and goodwill of all concerned in these operations, the relieving forces arrived too late on the scene. Already, by the middle of October, the gallant little Serbian Army had been beaten by overwhelming numbers, and was now well on its way in the course of that long-drawn flight through the snow-clad mountains of Montenegro and Albania, which eventually brought it to the coast of the Adriatic, where, after further delay, those who survived were at length transported, at the end of November, to the island of Corfu to rest and reorganize.

This retreat is commonly regarded as one of the most heroic and disastrous in modern history. Certainly in the history of the war there was nothing comparable with the mental and physical sufferings endured by the Serbs in their winter flight across the mountains of Albania.

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Meanwhile the French, on November 15th, made a determined effort to rescue a section of the Serbian Army that had been left behind in the retreat and was imprisoned in the Balouvna Pass. The attempt failed, and the French forces, heavily out-numbered by the Bulgars, began to retire from their advanced position in the bend of the Czerna, in order to secure their communications and fall back, if possible, on the base at Salonika. The Bulgars followed them as far as Doiran, and then, fortunately, desisted from the pursuit, possibly out of respect for the presence of the Greek Royalist Army, which was still hesitating and not yet prepared for open partisanship, owing to an embarrassing fear of France and Great Britain.

The French retreat, which started at the end of the first week in December, continued from Doiran through Macedonia on to Salonika. The British contingents were naturally involved in these movements, and the 10th Division engaged in some sharp fighting, while protecting the left flank of the French. The French and British forces, both in full retreat, met at Smol. After that, the two followed along parallel lines, till they reached their respective camps on the ridge of hills that lie in the background, and afford a natural protection to the immediate neighbourhood of Salonika.

MODES MACEDONIAN

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CHAPTER II

The Coveted City—The Jewish inhabitants—Brigands—Johnny Greeks—The Place de la Liberté—London police—Expeditionary Force Canteen—The Wise Woman of Salonika.

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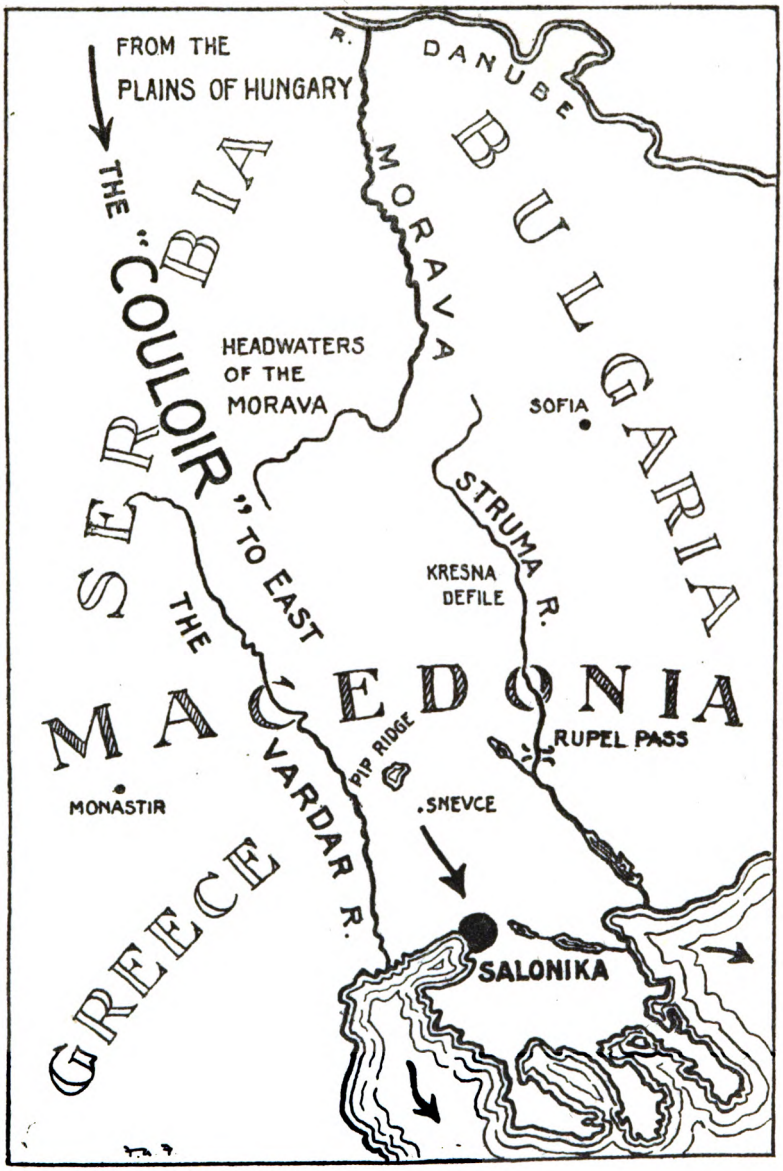

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CHAPTER II

THERE, before us, as we lay in the outer harbour, was the ancient " Coveted City ", still casting its spell on the newcomer, and flaunting its splendours through the grey-silver mist of the morning.

Truly Salonika presents a magnificent view from the sea. Built on a steep slope, the town ascends gracefully, through a series of richly coloured terraces, to a five mile belt of castellated walls in the form of a semi-circle. Red-roofed houses, chiefly of plaster and wood, with whitewashed walls splashed with blue and yellow, adorn the terraces; whilst, inset to the picture, and in striking contrast to the general rainbow effect of its foreground, are countless churches and mosques, with stately domes and slender minarets, surrounded by dark clumps of elm, mulberry and cypress trees.

Crowning all, and looking proudly down on twenty centuries of indomitable resistance to successive and often repeated attacks on the part of almost all the nations of Europe and Asia, stands in solemn majesty the ancient citadel. The strange harmony of the whole succeeds in producing a wonderful chiaroscuro of chaste and entrancing loveliness.

But that which most of all contributes to the charm of the scene is the way in which the small white straggling town on the foot-hills runs steeply down to the shore, slope upon slope, till its course is arrested at the very brink of the sea, which beyond the White Tower laps the garden walls of the villas, and even some of the houses. So close to the edge of the water does the town descend that it appears to float swanlike on the waves—an illusion not a little enhanced by the crowds of picturesque " dhows," ferry boats, and dancing " caïques " moored to the two or three miles of sea wall in front of the shops and hotels on the way to Kalamaria.

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Rising abruptly above the city, and forming a line of silent sentries to the north, is a series of rugged hills, terminating some little distance back to the right in the lofty wooded heights of Hortiach, and the still loftier mountain of Kotos. The wide sweep of the harbour, comprising the whole of the bay to the north-east end of the Gulf, lies in front. This fine expanse of water is further bounded on the east and west by the high headland of the Grand Karabou mountain, and the low-lying land of the Vardar estuary. The picture is one of extraordinary beauty.

In the east, however, distant appearances are wont to be delusive, so it should not have surprised us to discover that much of this bewitching enchantment of the picture presented by Salonika from the sea, yielded to somewhat mean and sordid realities when we landed at the quay.

Yet it would be untrue to say that all the beauty and charm of the place was gone. Many features, which were independent of the prevailing dirt and disorder of the town, remained as sources of delight and interest. The colour effects of the streets and shops were undeniably attractive. Very pleasing also to look on were the semi-oriental dwelling-houses, with their quaint Byzantine gables, curious Roman embossments, and sharp, overhanging roofs. These hybrid houses were conspicuous everywhere, and jutted out at a variety of angles into the streets, even in some of the most crowded thoroughfares. Artistic treasures of sorts were also discoverable in many out-of-the-way nooks and corners. Above, and enriching all, was the azure of a cloudless sky, and the glory of an Eastern sunshine.

A centre of interest, connected with native commerce and industry, was the long corridor or covered bazaar, constructed of wood, which stretched from the Rue Egnatia—part of the famous Via Egnatia trod by St. Paul—southwards towards the sea. This typical Eastern emporium, with its rich display of furs, carpets, gold and silver curios and glittering jewellery, provided a particularly attractive and picturesque sight. Here native commercial methods could be studied to advantage.

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The Rue Egnatia just referred to traversed the city from east to west, and with the Rue Venizelos, which ran north and south, constituted the two principal thoroughfares of the city. A few other fairly broad and straight streets cut through the commercial quarter of the town to the north-west. These streets, while quite equal to average Eastern standards, fell far short of those required by modern Western civilization. The smaller adjoining streets were narrow, tortuous lanes and alleys, wretchedly paved and worse drained.

Architecturally, Salonika had little of which to boast. Apart from a few Byzantine churches, long since converted into mosques—such as St. George, St. Demetrius, and St. Sophia; the classic Arch of Alexander, and the quaint old Moorish Turkish baths, at which I was a frequent visitor—there were few buildings on a large or imposing scale. The native houses were mostly fragile wooden structures, coated with lime or mud, and many in the poorer quarters were mere dilapidated hovels. The best modern buildings were the Ottoman Bank and certain schools and hospitals. The suburban villas, in Austro-Italian style, had a pretentious and tawdry appearance.

The various shortcomings described may be taken as some excuse for disillusioned officers, whose duties compelled them to spend monotonous months at the base, reviling " The Coveted City ". " What a dud place to live in ! " was the sort of contemptuous remark one heard from the " base wallah ".

But no such expressions of high-brow superiority ever escaped the lips of the rest of us, who habitually lived in the wilds of Macedonia, and only visited the metropolis on rare occasions. For us, Salonika was " Kweiss Kateer "—quite all right, or nothing to " grouse " about. With its crowded streets, busy shops, and noisy trams; with the Hôtel Splendide, the Olympus Palace, the White Tower, the Odeon, Floca Frères, and the Place de la Liberté, it offered various attractions, which, while possibly not rivalling those of Paris or the Lido, fully merited the title of " The Coveted City ".

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An outstanding feature of the population of Salonika, as we saw it, over and above its general cosmopolitan and polyglot character, was the extraordinarily large proportion of its Jewish inhabitants—roughly 100,000 out of a total of some 175,000 of all nationalities.

These representatives of the children of Israel were all Sephardic Jews, whose ancestors had fled in the sixteenth century from Spain and Portugal to escape the religious persecution of Ferdinand and Isabella. Their language was a corrupt form of Spanish, called Ladina (Latin), which was commonly spoken in Salonika.

Next to the Jews came the Greeks, who numbered about 30,000; and after them a group of some 2,000 Turkish Mussulmans. The remainder consisted of oddments—Bulgars, Serbs, Vlacks, Albanians, Montenegrins, Armenians, and gipsies of various tribes. There were also, amongst the dregs of the population, persons of mixed race who ordinarily lived by plunder, and were ready at any time to sell their souls for drachmae. In the piping times of peace, these adventurers formed bands of "comitadji", or brigands, in the neighbourhood of the town, and were a constant menace to the inhabitants, many of whom prior to our arrival had never dared to leave the precincts of their birthplace.

There can be little doubt that this unwise and ungodly rabble were the direct descendants of those "lewd fellows of the baser sort" whom St. Paul tells us in his days "formed an element of sedition", and on one memorable occasion "set all the city in an uproar". In our time they did nothing of the sort—not because their manners had mended, but simply because they were not given the chance. During the war, these miscreants, still compelled to live by their wits, were led by their cupidity to adopt the more respectable profession of spies in the pay of the enemy. As a result, numbers of them fell into the hands of our military police, and wherever caught, they were brought to the city for trial. Hanging followed conviction. This preliminary of a fair trial was an innovation in the Balkans, and from foreigners generally

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it received scant appreciation. Together with other methods of justice and liberty dear to British sentiment, the practice was regarded as a form of weakness. "Mais que faire?" Just such little weaknesses in the past have won half the world to our flag.

The native languages heard in the streets, besides the Ladina, already mentioned, were Greek, Turkish and Italian. French and Greek, the languages of commerce, were commonly used in the larger shops and restaurants. The "Jehus" or local drivers had a composite word of their own, "Haide-bros", and were known as Idey Brosses in consequence. The first syllable was the Turkish word "haide", the second the Greek "embros". It meant "look out there in front", or "get out of the way". Shouted at every corner, it added to the volume of noise, but was effectual and necessary in the circumstances.

The gamins of the town were quick to pick up English "as she is spoke"; and "Hey, Johnny, good morning!" (we were all Johnnies to the natives of Macedonia, as the natives were all Johnny Greeks to us) was a common form of greeting from these youngsters. "Mister, buy *Bawkannoos*", or "Mister, have boot shine", or "Mister, give backsheesh", were likely requests to follow, according to the particular avocation in life of the youthful linguist. The *Bawkannoos,* or more correctly, *The Balkan News*, was the bright little paper edited by Mr. H. Collinson Owen, and published daily for the Army in Salonika. It was full of interest and amusement.

With the addition to the Allies of Russian, Italian, Greek and Serbian contingents, who kept coming, the city grew to be more and more crowded and cosmopolitan as time went on.

Amongst all the nationalities represented, the Russian soldiers were conspicuous, as well by their workmanlike uniform as by their fine physique and handsome appearance. Tall and broad in proportion, with lithe limbs, fair and open countenances, and for the most part keen blue eyes, these hefty warriors suggested Greek gods from

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Olympus, or perhaps more properly young giants from the Caucasus. There was nothing in them of the Bolshevik type.

The fashionable rendezvous of the town was the Place de la Liberté. This, in the days before the fire, was an open square in the centre of the city, overlooking the sea, and flanked on two sides by cafés, with tables and chairs scattered over the broad pavement, to the manifest inconvenience of passers-by. There were several rival establishments, but the one most frequented by the military was the stylish restaurant at the top corner of the square on the left, known as Floca's. It was here that Staff and Regimental Officers, and young Subalterns from the trenches, almost invariably resorted to entertain nursing Sisters and V.A.D.'s from Field Ambulances and Base Hospitals.

In the summer months, when French, Italian and Serbian military bands played in turn on certain afternoons and evenings in the " Place ", the whole population flocked to the neighbourhood, forming a gay and motley assembly.

In the composite crowd which filled the centre of the square were soldiers and sailors from half the countries of Europe, with associated native soldiers and sailors from India, Algeria, Annam and Senegal, and officers of all ranks up to Admirals and Generals. Many of the foreign officers wore brilliant decorations and some—noticeably the Greeks and Italians—were gorgeously attired. The French and Serbian uniforms were " chic " and military, the British neat and practical.

Amongst the resident civilians, also attracted by the music, were a number of well-dressed ladies—mostly Greeks or Jewesses—who, with their husbands or male friends, could be seen seated at the tables below, or in the open windows above, indulging in cakes and ices, smoking cigarettes and chatting with officer acquaintances. In all this festive gathering the foreigners in general appeared animated and excited, the British aloof and unconcerned. But I have no doubt that in reality our own people, equally with the rest, succumbed to the joyous

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infection, and shared to the full in the prevailing delight and enthusiasm.

On the outskirts of the crowd were picturesque groups of Balkan peasants, commonly attired in coarse frieze relieved with bright-coloured cummerbunds. The Greek shepherds from the hills were dressed in white kilts and embroidered tunics, and they carried the peculiar shepherd crooks we desired so much for souvenirs.

Occasionally fearsome Albanian or Montenegrin warriors would appear on the scene, armed to the teeth, and resembling nothing so much as Gilbert and Sullivan's pirates. Then there were the ubiquitous, smartly-dressed Greek policemen. These officials wore conspicuous black silk trousers—conspicuous to us, not because they fitted closely in front, as trousers should, but because they were baggy behind and fell in a long fold to within three or four inches of the ground. It was a provocative style no doubt to the foreigner; but was this a sufficient excuse for wits amongst the expeditionary force affixing a profane and unmentionable name to this particular fashion in trousers?

The bulk of the traffic, in the ordinary way, and the common crowd collected about a junction of the Seres and Monastir roads, in the north-west of the city, yclept Piccadilly Circus. Here a hurricane stream of motor-cars and mechanical transport, and a welter of native carts and pedestrians, swept backwards and forwards day and night, under the skilful and careful control of our British Military Police. These splendid men (selected in many instances from the London Metropolitan Police Force, deservedly the pride of the Empire), by their constant courtesy, coolness and untiring devotion to duty, won the respect of all nationalities and contributed not a little to our prestige and popularity in the Balkans.

The immediate neighbourhood of the "Circus" further provided a market which, besides offering facilities for buying and selling, afforded opportunities for recreation, and contained features—such as entertainment booths and shooting galleries—generally associated with the idea of what in England would be called a fair, and in

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America would be described as a "mid-way". Market or fair, the place was an extremely popular resort, and one largely frequented, as well by peasants coming in from the country, as by many young soldiers of the Allied Armies who were sufficiently unsophisticated to be attracted by the stir of life and amusement, and the excitement offered by the varied and strange objects the place presented.

In close contact with this main-stream of traffic were refreshment stalls and buffets with monster glass flagons on the counters, the flagons resembling in shape and colour the familiar carboys of chemists' shops, but differing from them in this, that they were used not merely as ornaments, but also to store the lemonade, cordials and other soft drinks suitable to the season.

In front of the buffet were tables, temptingly spread with the same liquid concoctions in beakers, side by side with ice-cream in cornets, pyramids of all kinds of fruit, trays of Turkish Delight, and a bewildering profusion of other enticing oriental confectioneries. Alcoholic refreshments—"Vins de Samos", "mastics" and "cognacs"—were readily procurable in the numerous native wine-shops of the locality.

Besides the stalls for refreshments, there were others, displaying, as in a Woolworth Store, a multiplicity of cheap and useful articles. These ranged in our time from picture post-cards, shoe-laces and soap, to fly-traps, riding whips, swagger canes, Bibles and cameras. There were cabarets and dancing saloons in the neighbourhood; and gaudy exhibition halls, with large canvas advertisements outside, depicting in flaming colours grotesque and sensational freaks of every description. If these advertisements were true, the shows must have rivalled the horrors of Coney Island.

A couple of hundred yards farther up the Monastir road, which was part of the Via Egnatia, were three or four shops converted into miniature Harrods, outside which were dozens of lorries and motor-cars. This was the parent Expeditionary Force Canteen, from which branches

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were later on established in different parts of the country, to the exceeding comfort and joy of the British soldier in Macedonia.

Between the Post Office and the "Établissement Orosdi Back", a commercial emporium well known for its exacting methods, was the house of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. It was adjacent to the Catholic Church, and just through the gate of the church enclosure was the "Bureau de Charité" of the Sisters. Here, for the first time, I met Sister Augustine, an English lady convert since early womanhood from Anglicanism, who had been working for over fifty years in Salonika. A voluntary exile from country and friends, her life was spent in organizing, directing, and promoting every form of charitable and philanthropic work in the city. The work involved visiting the poorest of the poor, relieving distress, and carrying comfort and consolation to all classes and creeds.

She had lived through wars and revolutions, and under the rule of both Turks and Greeks. The Turks, she said, had bad laws and kept them; the Greeks had few laws and kept none. The Turks were tolerant of religion, so long as religion refrained from proselytizing. The Greeks were bigots, and persecutors. Turks, Bulgars, and Jews admired and loved the Sister; the Greeks liked her less. Many and constant were the visitors seeking her help or advice, and the number of these clients were greatly added to in the war by officers and men from all the Allied Armies. Even Generals consulted Sister Augustine on matters which required local knowledge. She received all with equal affability and dignity, conversing with them fluently in their different languages, and giving attention to small as well as to more important matters. No trouble was spared so long as it could afford any help or a little pleasure to anybody. I knew of one young British officer who obtained through her agency a shot-gun and ammunition, when sporting guns were almost impossible to purchase. When I myself was in hospital, she came miles by lorry to visit me.

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Regarding the final issue of the war, Sister Augustine was always optimistic, with an optimism based on a deep conviction of the justice of Divine Providence, and a patriotic belief in the special mission of religious liberty of the British Empire. Her forecast in summary of the result of the struggle, as it would be presented to the world in the perspective of history, was this: A war broke out in Europe in 1914 on the occasion of the assassination of an Austrian Archduke. Many nations became involved in the struggle, which eventually attained the dimensions of a world war, and brought much havoc to Europe. It concluded in a victory for the Allies, signified by the passing of Jerusalem from the control of the Turks to the rule of Great Britain.

Sister Augustine was close on eighty when I knew her; she was one of the most remarkable and charming women it has been my good fortune to meet. No wonder she came to be known as the " Wise Woman of Salonika ".

That this semi-oriental city by the sea, the ancient capital of a classic Empire, the Thessalonica of St. Paul, with the blue waters lapping its quays; with the gay crowds thronging its streets; with its quaint rainbow-coloured houses, modern hotels and places of amusement; with its solemn Mohammedan mosques, slender minarets, and stately Christian churches; with its centres of commercial avidity and wealth, and its purlieus of poverty and squalor—that this city of strange contrasts, of kaleidoscopic colour, of garish gaiety and butterfly beauty, should have captivated the imaginations of many of us, so that memory returns to it with pleasant recollections, is intelligible enough. But why should the small town be the object of international rivalry? The answer is to hand in the unique strategical position which it occupies on the map of Europe.

Geographically, Macedonia consists of all the country of the Vardar and of the head-waters of the Morava, together with the low watershed between the two rivers. These valleys cut a passage through the central upland in an east to west direction, and form a " couloir " or

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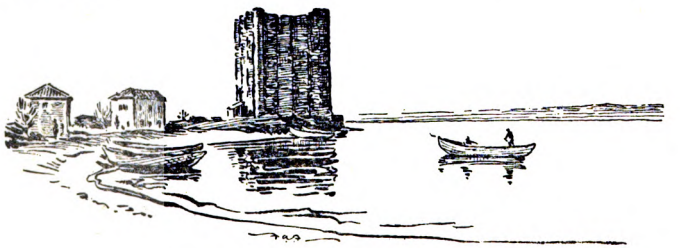
long corridor leading from the plains of Hungary to the north of the Ægean Sea in the south. At the bottom of the "couloir" stands the port of Salonika, a great Southern gate, opening and shutting, and thus controlling, the sea route to Asia Minor and the East.

That the original Via Egnatia, constructed by the Romans in 168 B.C., was made to follow the same general direction was due to the fact that the primary object of this great thoroughfare was, not to develop Southern Macedonia, but to link up the Empire with the East. The ancient Roman road formed part of a larger route which led from Rome to Brindisi, and thence by the short sea-crossing to Durazzo. From Durazzo, the road passed by way of Struga, Monastir, and Salonika to Constantinople, and across the Sea of Marmora into Armenia and Persia.

At a later date another road from Monastir put Rome in communication with her Danube provinces.

The modern Drang-nach-Osten of the Central Empires, as evinced by the projected extension of the Berlin-Baghdad railway, via Salonika and Constantinople, has been aptly compared to the former Eastward thrust of Imperial Rome. In both, the ambition to dominate the countries of the East was the compelling motive, and the reason behind this motive was the idea, long prevalent and taken for granted in the West, that the conquest and possession of those distant and proverbially rich lands was at once the natural destiny of a great military and commercial empire, and the clearest indication of world supremacy.



ANCIENT TOWER ON LAKE LANGAZA.

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CHAPTER III

The Macedonian front — General Sarrail's army — The "Bird Cage"—Caravan route between Salonika and Seres—Fertility of the country — Wild flowers and insects — The climate — Ninety mile front.

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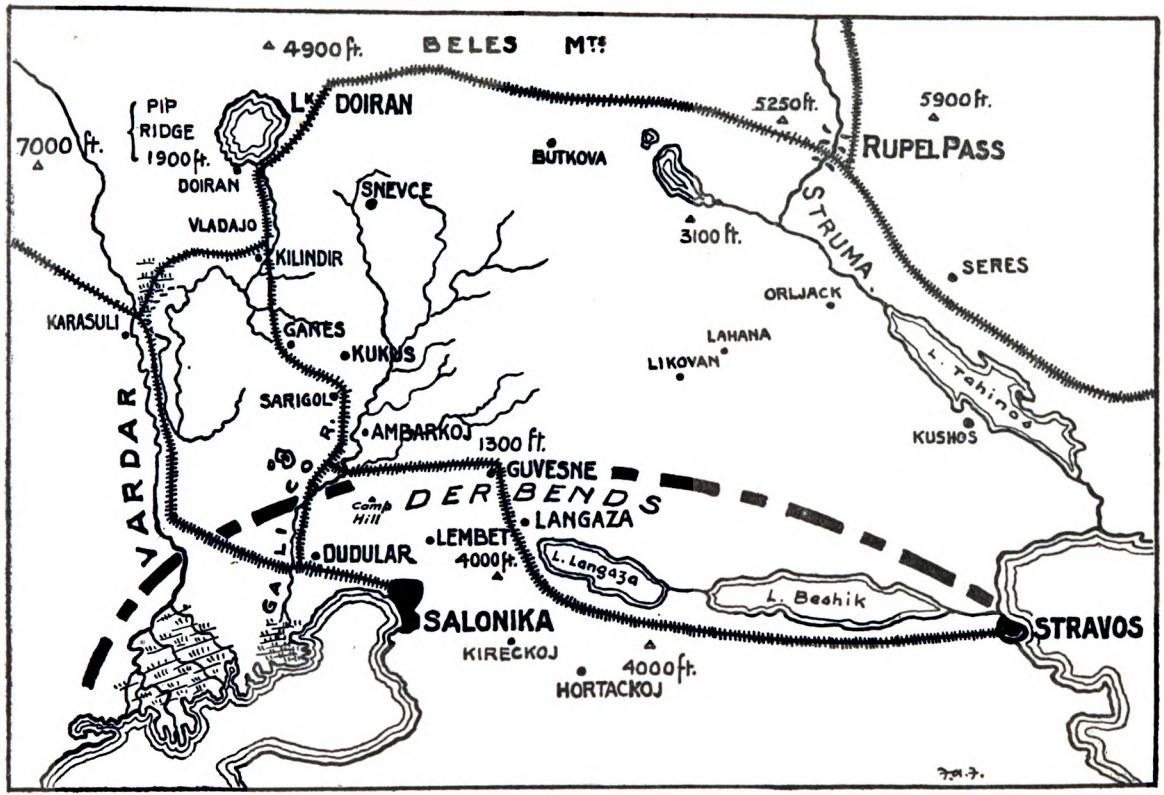

THE ENTRENCHED CAMP OF SALONIKA.

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CHAPTER III

THE first stage of the war in the Balkans ended with the disastrous retreat of the Serbian Army in the winter of 1915, already described. So complete was this defeat that, by the end of the year, Serbia, for months previously almost in despair of help from her powerful allies, was utterly crushed. Practically she had ceased to exist as a nation. The army on which she had depended, now a starving rabble, was no longer an army even in name.

At this moment of supreme anguish and crisis in her fate came the relief force—too late, it is true, and too ill-prepared to win complete success, but still able to achieve important moral and political results. Once more in her chequered history, Serbia reasserted her independence, and with the help of France and England armed herself anew for defence. By May, 1917, her reorganized army, though still less than a third of its original strength, reappeared in the field, and for the rest of the campaign showed itself inferior to none in effective daring and gallantry.

The second stage of the war opened with the New Year, and lasted from January, 1916, to the end of March of the same year. There was no actual fighting during this period, but nevertheless it was a trying time, full of intensive preparation and hard work for the Allied Staffs and Armies.

The Bulgars, it is true, were known to be digging themselves in along the line they were to hold for the coming three years, so, perhaps, there was no particular reason for apprehension from them. On the other hand, rumours were persistently being circulated, chiefly from Athens, to the effect that the Germans were coming from somewhere to drive us all helter-skelter into the sea.

Meanwhile British and French reinforcements were daily arriving in the harbour and pouring into Salonika. The British troops, under General Sir Brian Mahon,

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already numbered 14,000; the French under General Sarrail, who was also Commander-in-Chief of the Allied forces, were more than double that number. In addition, the Italian Expeditionary Force of 30,000 had arrived at Valona in December, while the Russians and Serbs were expected later. Following the 10th Division, the British sent some further splendid Divisions—the 22nd, 26th, 27th, and 28th. These formed our subsequent two Army Corps, viz., the XIIth and XVIth.

To administer this growing army, well nigh two thousand miles by sea and land from its nearest home-base, and in a country which was virtually a wilderness, was at once a colossal task, and the first and most urgent necessity. Accordingly General Sarrail deferred any idea of attempting to advance at the moment, and decided to concentrate on consolidating the positions he already held as far as the Greek frontier, and also on establishing and securing a suitable base at Salonika.

This involved an extraordinary burden on the Allied Armies during the three months and after. Quays and docks—there was only one quay when we arrived—had to be built. A Main Supply Base had also to be constructed by the sea; while inland, dumps, camps, hospitals, offices, and ammunition and commissariat depots had to be established. There was the further difficulty of organizing transport, and planning and linking up the different lines of communication between various contingents scattered through an almost roadless country nearly the size of England and Wales. Above all, Salonika had to be fortified. The city in these early days was an open port, without any modern defence; though protected by our fleet on the south, it was completely exposed on the north or land side.

In carrying out all this preparatory work, the Allied Armies achieved feats of military engineering which will compare with the greatest triumphs of ancient or modern times. Prominent amongst these achievements was the "entrenched camp of Salonika", which, when finished, was one of the strongest fortresses of the war. It com-

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prised a sixty-mile line of continuous defences, which ran from the Delta of the Vardar at the extreme south-west to Stavros on the Gulf of Orfano in the east, and afforded complete protection and security to our base.

The nature of the ground covered by this line helped much to these results. Not only was there the high ridge of the Derbends to the north, eight miles behind the old city walls, and dominating a ten-mile expanse of plain, broken only by the solitary outpost hill of Gibraltar, but there were further natural barriers to the east and west.

On the east, the broad lakes of Langaza and Beshik extended for twenty-five miles to the coast, where British monitors commanded the only available road for the transport of heavy artillery from the Struma.

On the west, a further natural barrier was provided by the fifteen-mile depth of impassable morass of the Vardar delta. In fact, the only weak portion of the natural defences was a stretch of rolling plains between the main stream of the Vardar, and the Galico river.

This portion received special attention from the French engineers, who strengthened the sector by means of unusually deep trenches and dug-outs, reveted with solid masonry, and flanked at short intervals with concrete machine-gun and artillery emplacements. The rest of the line was proportionately guarded, while every avenue of approach for miles around was effectually barred by an elaborate system of wire entanglements. On account of the wiring, which was the only visible sign of the fortification, the official entrenched camp of Salonika came to be known by the British as the " Bird Cage ".

Another engineering feat scarcely less striking, and calculated to confer a lasting boon on the country, was the building of a network of roads through the occupied territory. The work began in the early days of 1916 with the construction of minor roads, to connect the entrenched camp with the city, and with the immediate outlying districts. In many cases this work was supplemented by light Decauville railways. Later, first-class roads, with carefully calculated gradients, stone bridges, parapets and

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culverts, were constructed to form lines of communication with the different fronts. Early in 1917 we ran a light railway from Janes across the plain to Causica, half-way between Karasuli and Kilindir, to transport ammunition and supplies for distribution to our front line.

The building, and the constant repairing of these roads, rendered necessary by the friable nature of much of the lower strata of subsoil, and by the ceaseless heavy traffic, lasted practically till the end of the campaign; though native labour was largely employed, the task put a heavy additional strain on the Allied forces.

On our first coming to Macedonia, there was only one high-road worthy of the name—this was the ancient Via Egnatia which the Romans developed into the Monastir road described in a previous chapter. Yet even this road required almost complete reconstruction. The new portion, which was mainly the result of French labour and enterprise, followed the same course as its predecessor, and after leaving Dudular station, just beyond the city boundary, pursued a straight line for several miles across the plains of the Vardar. It continued in a less regular course through hilly and wooded country, until, after descending into the south-west corner of the Monastir plateau at Florina, it finally reached the Serbian capital. Eventually this road became the chief line of communication for the Western section of the French and Serbian Armies.

The other roads we found in the country were little more than cross-country tracks. These being soft underfoot were no doubt well adapted to the slow-moving pack-donkeys and the quaint little high ox-wagons on wheels without tyres, the regular means of conveyance used by the peasants, but they were hopeless for the transport of a modern army. They provided, however, a network of routes, which we converted into magnificent highways, gradually covering hundreds of miles, and forming a specially close web of communication between the Beles range of mountains and the coast-line connecting the mouths of the Vardar and Struma rivers.

One of these new highways ran eastward from Salonika

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across the plateau of Hortiach (properly Hortiach-koj, pronounced Hortiach-koy, the " j " in Greek answering to our " y ") to Stavros and its immediate neighbourhood.

The first five miles of this road formed a broad, uninterrupted way across undulating hills and valleys. But once the village of Kirikoj was entered, the road suddenly narrowed to a single-file alley. To control the traffic here, police signallers—who alternately halted and advanced the opposite streams of lorries and motor-cars—had to be stationed at either end of the village.

The resulting congestion caused considerable delay on one of the Army's busiest routes, but there was no help for it. The village was situated at the head of a precipitous gorge, and there was no ground on either side to divert the road. In this respect, Kirikoj, like most Macedonian villages, was a victim of the war history of the country, which obliged scattered communities to select the most inaccessible sites as dwelling-places, and to build up their small towns and villages and the general plan of a maze of zigzagging streets. Only thus might surprise attacks be prevented, and the incursion of marauders guarded against.

Two miles beyond Kirikoj was Hortiach. Here the plateau was literally studded with hospitals and training camps, which reached right up to its northern edge, overlooking for miles the peaceful plains of Langaza.

Another fine highway started from the Monastir road beyond Dudular, and led to Janes, the headquarters of our XIIth Corps. This road was constructed in 1917 entirely under the direction of the Royal Engineers. After following a western course for a few miles along the south bank of the Galico, it crossed the river at a point beyond the promontory of Gibraltar—the Westward outpost of our defence line. Thence it proceeded north by way of Amberkoj to Sarigol, where it picked up with one of the three single line railways, which, from widely different directions, converged on Salonika. This branch railway formed part of the Junction-Salonika-Constantinople line. After Doiran it turned eastward, and skirting Bulgaria, reached Constantinople via Seres and Drama.

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It was with a view to extending this important railhead beyond Doiran, so as to secure command of the line to Constantinople and the East, that several offensive operations were attempted against the Bulgar positions on the hills overlooking the lake. These included an unsuccessful effort by the French in 1916, and the two big battles of Doiran fought in April and May, 1917.

Superior in importance even to the Monastir road and to the Sarigol-Kukus-Janes line of communication, was the new Seres road, which followed the old caravan route between Salonika and Seres, and afforded the means of supply and transport for the whole of the troops scattered over our sixty mile long Struma front.

Starting from " Piccadilly Circus ", this fine highway —truly the monarch of the roads of Macedonia—swept majestically over plain, hill, and dale to a point fifty miles north-east of Salonika near Orljak, where the XVIth Corps had its headquarters. On its broad, straight track were a succession of dumps, ammunition parks, motor transport and ordnance workshops, reserve camps, casualty clearing stations, and various other army depots; while over it, continuously day and night, convoys of ration, supply and ammunition lorries, ambulances and motor-cars, varied by batteries of artillery, rolled along rumbling and thundering. Labour and infantry battalions with their long lines of transport, and occasional mounted troops, also moved backwards and forwards, more slowly certainly and possibly less noisily.

A road of that character could not fail to acquire fame and distinction—in fact, it gained both to such a degree that it passed with us for " The Road ", so that events occurring on it were commonly referred to without any mention of the name of the road, but simply as having happened at one or another of its eighty or more familiar kilometres. Thus if an event was described as having taken place at Kilo 25, everyone understood the exact location intended.

Travelling to the front by this route, the first notable landmark to be reached was the Lembet Pass—a narrow

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cutting through the rock between the hills of the Bird Cage. After this, the road crossed the plain, leaving Langaza well on the right. The next point, seven miles farther on, was Guvesne, which has been cynically described as " a village and tract of country consisting of camps, stores, rocks, lizards and thistles ". It was, in fact, the site of the principal " dumps " of the area. Consequently this part came to be increasingly congested by heavy transport, and it was to relieve some of this congestion that a standard gauge railway was constructed in 1917 between Guvesne and Salonika.

The road now ascended, and continued to climb a series of hills, which, to the north of Amberkoj, spread out in disorderly fashion all the way to the Struma valley. The hills and valleys—some wide and undulating; others narrow and precipitous—ran on almost to the end of the journey. The result was a veritable switchback, with the attendant thrills, delights or terrors, of that form of entertainment.

At its highest point, between Lahana and Likovan, the road suddenly opens up a magnificent view of the Struma and Butkovo valleys. This is probably the finest view in all Macedonia, and certainly typical of the best Balkan scenery. On the North is the great wall of the Beles, or Belashitza range, here grey with the bare granite rock, there tinted and clothed with the subdued green of low-growing shrubs. To the East, as far as the eye can see, lies the vast plain, dotted with occasional patches of cultivation—mostly maize and fruit farms—and small white minareted villages, which fringe the silver bands of the rivers as they wind picturesquely to the broad lake of Tahinos, and beyond to the wide expanse of the Ægean.

It is not the cameo beauty of England: there is only one beautiful Britain, as there is only one lovely Japan. But it is space and grandeur and glory—the space and grandeur of wide unadorned nature, the glory of prodigal wealth, of a country rich in resources, but neglected by civilization, and untamed by Man's art.

Amongst the neglected resources of this rich territory

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are valuable minerals, such as coal, lignite, sulphur, iron, zinc, lead, arsenic, antimony, gold and silver. Local deposits of all these are known to have been discovered and worked by the ancient Greeks and Romans. But for hundreds of years this source of wealth has been overlooked, and no attempt has been made in modern time to explore or utilize it.

The country is still richer in the fertility of its soil. Wheat and maize produce abundant crops in most areas, while rice and cotton are successfully grown in the low-lying valleys. On the hillsides, vines and fruit trees thrive, and opium poppies flourish luxuriously on plain and plateau. Tobacco is another staple product of the soil in certain districts. But despite these possibilities, only six per cent. of this rich agricultural land is tilled, the rest being left entirely barren. Pasturage is likewise neglected, and forestry is an unknown art to the inhabitants. Vast tracts of grassland, which could easily fatten great herds and flocks, are given over, undrained, to grazing a few lean cows and oxen.

Apart from a number of evergreen oaks which climb the sides of the mountains, and a few poplars and beeches along some of the roads near the towns, there are but few trees of any size in the country. This is largely due to the ravages of war in the past, and the neglect of any subsequent afforestation. Yet the natural vegetation of the country is prolific, and its flora is extremely varied and beautiful.

The season for wild flowers is March and April. Then, for a period of six or eight weeks, the vegetable kingdom makes carnival! Violets, anemones, hairbells, wild roses, hyacinths and lilies, as well as many other less familiar species of plant and shrub life, all seem to spring up and blossom together. At this time of the year, acres upon acres of green grass, spangled with lovely pink and white asphodels, cover the hill-tops and clothe the landscape for miles with splendour. The plains are further enriched by open fields of gorgeous poppies—white, red and dark purple. The scene is a very riot of colour. Unfortunately this floral glory passes as quickly

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as it comes, and under the scorching rays of a sub-tropical sun, the bright variegated colours soon begin to fade, and quickly parch into a uniform dull grey for the rest of the spring and summer. This profusion of nature was good for us while it lasted, for we were thankful in those days for small mercies.

Another and more abiding interest, especially to naturalists, entomologists and sportsmen, was provided by the wonderful fauna of the country. Wolves, deer, boars, foxes, jackals, wild cats, dogs and goats, hares and rabbits, abounded and roamed or grazed, according to their kind, over mountains and moors. Reptiles, including snakes, were plentiful; tortoises, lizards, and scorpions were to be found everywhere. Toads and frogs bred and multiplied in the woods and marshes.

Amongst the birds were ducks and geese, pheasants and partridges, crows, jays, magpies, doves, quails and storks. There were also great numbers of eagles, vultures and owls. The storks stood on every chimney and steeple, whilst the jays, displaying brilliantly blue plumage, reminded us of those we had previously seen in Gallipoli. As for insects—bees, beetles, and bugs of every description—the country simply swarmed with them. Flies, and several large species of horse-flies of a brilliant green hue, were special banes; but the anopheles, or, more strictly, the female of the malarial mosquito, was the greatest foe against which we had to contend.

Another factor to be reckoned with was the climate, which is temperate during the spring and autumn of the year, but provides extremes of temperature in summer and winter. Through the summer we experienced long spells of heat, when the thermometer often rose to well over 100° Fahrenheit in the shade. At such times military work was impracticable during several hours in the middle of the day. The autumn was a season of torrential rains! At this time, the "Vardar" wind blew for periods of four or five days together, and in summer was attended with suffocating heat and dust; it was followed by deluges, which were in turn succeeded by further spells of cold and

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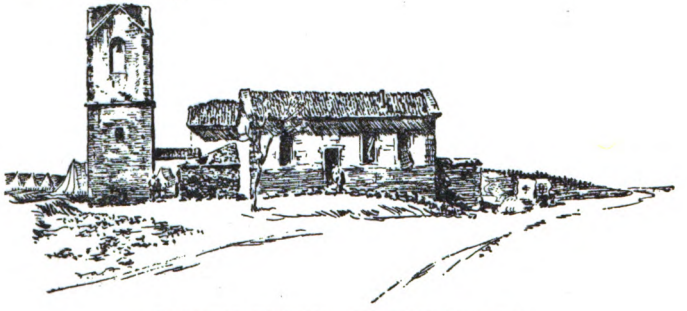
damp weather. In winter, we were exposed to occasional blizzards which continued for days on end, and left the country snow and ice-bound for considerable periods. Hence it was only during a few weeks of the spring and autumn that military operations on the grand scale could be undertaken with any prospect of success.

The extent of the British zone, which was at first shared by the French, changed from time to time. In 1917 the whole of the ninety-mile front, from Guevgelli on the Vardar to the mouth of the Struma, was placed in our hands; later, in 1918, when the Greek Army was combined with the British, the portion under our control was extended to one hundred and thirty-five miles and made to comprise the former Greek sector. The French on our left carried the line on beyond Monastir; while the Italians and Rumanians continued it still farther west through Southern Serbia and Albania. The complete Allied line reached from the north of the Ægean Sea by Stavros on the east to the Adriatic coast of the Strait of Otranto on the west, and took in more than half of the whole of the Balkan Peninsula.

Such was the Macedonian front on which the Allies held constant and faithful vigil, struggling for three long monotonous years against all the odds of nature and man, until that supreme moment in the autumn of 1918, when to their lasting honour, the combined Armies first broke the enemy resistance in the East, and turned the tide of war from stagnation and deadlock to triumphant advance and final victory.



DRESSING STATION—GUGUNCI CHURCH.

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CHAPTER IV

The Bulgar lines — Our camp near Langaza — Importance of donkeys—Primitive harvesting—Sulphur baths—Langaza frogs —Stavros—Colonel Noble of the Marines—Red tape and a pack-saddle—Our lone trek—Balkan cabarets—No-man's-land on the Gola Ridge—The end of Red Ginger.

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THE VISIT TO MASLAR TROOP.

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CHAPTER IV

WHILE the infantry and engineers were hard at work constructing roads and fortifying hills round Salonika, my old 2nd South Midland Mounted Brigade, the Notts and Derbys—now known as the 7th Mounted—were engaged in patrolling the front beyond the marches of the " Bird Cage ".

On arriving in the country I was immediately posted to them, and attached by the Brigade to the headquarters of the Derby Yeomanry, with whom I began my military experiences shortly after the commencement of the war. There was no delay on my part; I started next morning to join the regiment at Langaza, where headquarters and " A " Squadron were under canvas.

Army could give me transport only as far as the old rest camp at Karassi. But before I had been there half an hour, to my great relief and delight, a convoy arrived from the regiment, who straightway escorted me to my destination. Lieutenant R. H. Humphries and Trooper King were of the party, and between them they arranged the loan of a horse for me, while my baggage travelled on the half-limber brought for the purpose.

Reaching camp in good time on the Saturday evening, I was able to arrange overnight for the service which took place early the next morning in a large field tent, and was splendidly attended.

Sunday afternoon and next day were given to renewing and making acquaintances. There were several changes in the regiment—Lieutenant-Colonel G. A. Strutt was now the O.C., with Major the Honourable Dudley Carleton as his Second-in-Command, and Captain F. B. Swanwick Adjutant. Colonel Strutt and Captain Swanwick I had met in England and in the Dardanelles. The Major was a new acquaintance, who, however, soon

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became as good a friend to me as the rest. Captain R. M. Wilson was still our M.O.

I was looking out for a batman, when Trooper J. H. Tugby, of "A" Squadron Transport, came to my tent on Tuesday evening, and volunteered his services. He was a Catholic from Yorkshire, and his father carried on a large building business in Swinton, where he was well known and respected. He was only eighteen and had joined up under the Derby Scheme. Though a stranger to me, everything in the youth's appearance and manner —he was well set up, of fair complexion, and frank and straightforward—at once appealed to me. He wanted to be my servant because he was a Catholic—would I have him? Of course I would, if I could get him.

First I approached the Transport Officer, who reluctantly gave his consent. Tugby, he said, was the smartest boy of his lot, but if I required him, I must have him. The Orderly Room did the rest, and the next morning Trooper Tugby reported to me for duty. We soon became pals, and we have remained fast friends ever since. He continued to be my servant until the end of the war. He has since married and is the proud father of a young family.

Our camp, well off the road, and by the side of a little stream that ran into the lake a mile or two to the east, was conveniently near to the town of Langaza. This was quite a fair-sized place, and contained a few decent farmhouses on the outskirts, where there were also a number of rather large trees. The streets, of course, were without pavements, and consisted, as usual, of mud, holes and stones. In addition there were some half-dozen petrol gas lamps. Most of the houses were dirty and dilapidated.

The better class of houses conformed to the prevailing type of farm cottages throughout the country. This type of dwelling was a two-storied house, the lower rooms of which were merely earth-floored stables, and were commonly used for storing the farm tools, and the winter supply of corn and fuel. Outside, a wooden staircase led up to a verandah, off which were the two or three living-rooms of the family. Each room was provided with a

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fireplace, a couch or bed, and some scanty furniture of the roughest sort.

In the Turkish and Bulgar houses, which we always preferred for billeting, the beds as a rule were spotlessly clean. There was also a profusion of whitewash, and plenty of evidence of scrubbing and cleaning. The children in the villages appeared to be well kept and sufficiently nourished and healthy. On the other hand, public sanitation was woefully lacking, the houses being without baths or water-closets or even cesspools. There was no water supply, and what was required for household purposes had to be fetched in jars or buckets from wells or streams, never far distant.

I do not remember visiting the church at Langaza, but I recall making a journey, months afterwards, with a non-Catholic officer to inspect a very old and interesting parish church in the neighbouring village of Baldza.

The outside of the building was plain, but the simple piety of the interior impressed us both. There were neither chairs nor benches in the nave, which was divided up the centre by a roped-off path, to separate the men from the women. In the sanctuary, which was entirely shut off from the rest of the church by a wide screen, lavishly decked with ikons, were a number of stalls and lecterns. Sacred pictures on wood also adorned the walls of the aisles.

Before leaving, we lit candles in honour of the Patron, St. George, and, on our way out, the very unwashed sacristan gave us each a rose from the garden. Just beyond the village we passed the priest on his way back to the presbytery. He did not seem to notice us, but we observed him closely as he rode by on his donkey, followed by a boy who ran behind, and alternately coaxed and belaboured the beast with a stick.

The priest was a middle-aged and lean man, with a full beard and long lank hair, much greased and tied up in a knot at the back. Add to these adornments a shabby high stove-hat of the conventional type, and a long greenish-black robe, carelessly tucked up, and you have

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a picture of a typical orthodox country pastor. I saw many such priests on the roads afterwards. They did not appear to me altogether presentable, and I sometimes wondered if our eminently respectable Anglican clergy would be quite as keen on reunion with the Eastern Churches if they had lived for a time in the Orient, and seen their desired confrères at close quarters.

Donkeys were common objects in Macedonia, and entered much into the life of the countryside. A young donkey could be purchased for three or four drachmae, and, when grown up, he was available for almost any and every sort of transport. Often you might see in the distance what appeared to be a small haystack walking along on its own; but when the moving mass drew near, closer inspection would discover a donkey in the midst of it all.

There were other and more serious settings in which this lowly animal of the people revived memories for ever sacred in the history of the race. More than once I saw on the road a group straight from the Bible—a donkey bearing a woman and a child, and led by a man. It was the Flight into Egypt to the life—the same donkey, the same pack-saddle, and the same manner of dress, now as then.

There were other customs also which recalled life as described in the Bible, as, for example, the primitive methods of harvesting. Both in Palestine and Egypt threshing and winnowing from time immemorial have been accomplished in the open, according to this method which is still pursued. A round beaten space in the fields, preferably on an eminence, so as to be exposed to the free sweep of air currents, provides the floor on which the sheaves are first spread in a wide circle. Over them four or five oxen, harnessed to a heavy oblong board, roughened on its underside by having sharp stones or nails inserted, are driven round and round until a sufficient loosening of the grain is effected. Additional weight to that of the driver is supplied by heavy stones placed on top.

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The first time I saw the counterpart of this in Macedonia was on a journey from Janes to Causica, with my friend, Captain A. O. Morris, of the 90th Anti-Aircraft Section, Royal Artillery. He was taking me in his car to visit one of his gun positions.

It was a bright sunny morning, and as we approached the village of Hadji Junus, we were surprised by the sound of an indescribable din caused by shouts and cries mingled with peals of laughter. This medley of human expression in an apparently deserted Greek village mystified us at first, but on reaching the centre of the village, our puzzlement was solved. There a strange sight was revealed. Travelling round and round the circumference of a circle of hard earth, about thirty feet in diameter, appeared a large wooden sledge drawn by a tiny donkey and an ox, harnessed tandem. Seated or standing on the sledge were the driver, a Greek peasant, his wife, and the numerous members of his family—a good round dozen in all! They were shouting and singing whilst the younger members banged tins at intervals.

What was it all about? Were these folk taking part in some family game, or was it a serious business? On stopping to inquire the cause of the commotion, we received a full explanation. The rotund, good-natured peasant, grinning all over his face, explained that he was threshing corn, and that the weight of himself and his family helped to loosen the grain from the husks. When this was accomplished, he added, the next process was that of winnowing. The bruised husks were gathered from the threshing floor, and a favourable day awaited with a suitable wind. Then, willing hands would cast the chaff and grain into the air from shovels and sieves, and the chaff being lighter was carried away by the wind, whilst the grain fell to the ground, to be collected, stored and eventually ground into meal by the women-folk, and made into the coarse brown bread of the country.

The native population, here as elsewhere in Macedonia, apart from a sprinkling of Bulgars, consisted chiefly of Greeks and Turks. The proportion of the two national-

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ities was equally distributed, so that it was quite the usual thing to find a village divided by its main street into two distinct parts, of which one would be Turkish, and the other Greek, with a small Bulgar element—the Turkish side being invariably distinguished from the Greek by an appearance of markedly greater cleanness and tidiness. There was little fusion between the two parties. In fact, law and order, such as they were in that country, was the single unifying principle; it was represented in the person of a so-called Greek gendarme, usually a retired comitadji or brigand of notoriety, who, by reason of his past exploits, commanded a measure of respect from all.

The Greeks were much divided in their loyalties. The King's party, nominally our friends, were really pro-German, and constantly intrigued against us. The party of M. Venizelos, on the other hand, were equally pro-British, and consequently were anxious to enter actively into the war on the side of the Allies, which, after the revolution at the end of July, they did. The remaining party of the Army was an uncertain quantity to the end, and of its politics and feelings we knew little or nothing.

Of all the native inhabitants, the Turks proved to be the most reliable. If a Turk entertained you—and he appeared to be always willing to do so, even though your nation was at war with his—you knew that you were perfectly safe. This was one reason why our patrols, when they were obliged to stay out at night at any village, sought hospitality at the principal Turkish house, where it was invariably accorded with the best grace, and the greatest generosity possible in the circumstances.

In physique and general appearance, the Turks and Bulgars—some of them really fine-looking men—had the advantage over the Greeks, who were usually both smaller and less presentable.

The market, which gave Langaza its chief claim to distinction and attracted visitors from miles around, was held weekly in a wide and long corridor that ran through the centre of the town. Here, vegetables and fruits, wines and spirits, and all sorts of merchandise of reliable quality,

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could be obtained at a far cheaper cost than in Salonika. It was, in fact, a sort of Covent Garden for all Southern Macedonia, and since it was also in part a social gathering, residents and visitors alike would come in their gala attire, and avail themselves of these occasions to display their finest and most gorgeous raiment, the men appearing in wonderful red, green and yellow sashes and shirts, and the women in correspondingly bright head-dresses and pinafores.

Within a mile of the town, in connection with one of the thermal springs for which the neighbourhood was famous, was a fine old octagonal Roman bath. This building was solidly constructed of stone, and covered by a domed roof, perforated by large holes for the purpose of light and ventilation. The basin of the bath was of marble, and through it ran a stream of sulphur water which was really hot, but not so hot as to be unpleasant. The place appeared to be free and open to all at any time. There were many such baths in the country, and I never missed an opportunity of patronizing them. The Langaza bath accommodated forty or fifty swimmers at a time, and it used to be crowded with officers and men every day, in the mornings and evenings. But neither there, nor in any of the other baths, do I remember ever encountering native bathers. Whether they abstained on our account, or on principle, we never knew; but it was all to our advantage that they did so.

Game in the neighbourhood of our camp was extraordinarily abundant. Great flocks of geese and wild duck, and swarms of snipe, inhabited the vicinity of the lake, while quantities of partridges, as well as a number of brown hares, were to be met on the foot-hills. Grouse alone were absent. I remember Colonel Strutt and Major Carleton used to disappear from the camp towards evening, armed with guns that were not rifles, and that the headquarters mess was invariably supplied with better fare than mere army rations.

Everyone who spent any time about Langaza will recall the frogs, big and little, old and young, fat and

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lean! The old fat frogs lay in the streams off the road-sides all day sunning themselves; and, when we passed, they would blow out their cheeks into big bubbles, and say:

"Wah! Tchah, tchah, tchah!"

This was all right; but it was a different matter when, as in the play of Aristophanes, countless thousands "raised their full choir shout", and sang through the night:

"Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax;
Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax!"

Then the uproar was such as to awaken light sleepers, and it was even known to have caused alarms of Zepp raids. In the circumstances, it was not surprising that other croakers were to be found amongst ourselves, who, like Dionysus of old, mocked and cursed "the children of the lake and fountain":

"Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax;
Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax!
Hang you and your ko-axing too,
There's nothing but ko-axing with you!"

Yet this was not all the truth. The Langaza frogs were not ordinary frogs—they were of the edible sort, and had extraordinarily fat hind legs. These succulent members, cooked to a turn and served on toast, provided a favourite delicacy at our mess. When this bonne-bouche appeared on the table of an evening, the offences of the previous night were invariably forgiven and forgotten.

Our Brigade, which was made up of the Derbyshire Yeomanry, the South Notts Hussars, and the Sherwood Foresters, had been given the task, with other Yeomanry detachments, of patrolling and reconnoitring the whole of the British zone, comprising a breadth of well over a hundred, and a depth of at least twenty-five miles. North of this line was the neutral area occupied by the Greek Army, with headquarters at Seres.

To cover so extensive a front, the regiments and squadrons were necessarily widely separated. Thus the

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"B" Squadron, the nearest to us at the time, was eighteen miles east of Langaza, at a place called Langavuk, while "D" Squadron was another twenty-seven miles farther on at Stavros.

During my first ten days, I contented myself with visiting the few scattered troops of the Derbyshires in the neighbourhood, and also a camp of the South Notts at Guvesne. Then on the 16th, I started off with my batman for Langavuk, to spend a few days with Major A. A. Shuttleworth's Squadron. I found them encamped in a sort of ravine or nullah, while in other nullahs near by were an R.F.A. Battery, a Field Ambulance, and three infantry battalions of the Royal Irish, the Leinsters, and the Royal Irish Fusiliers.

All these units belonged to the 27th Division, who had their headquarters also at Langavuk. The infantry, apart from their officers, were nearly all Catholics. There were three R.C. Chaplains in the place—Fathers Reardon, Bowes, C.SS.R., and Rusher.

Father Reardon was attached to the 81st Field Ambulance, and Fathers Bowes and Rusher to the Royal Irish Fusiliers and the Leinsters. The Royal Irish had no Padre of their own, and thereby hangs a tale.

The next day, Friday the 17th, was the Feast of St. Patrick, and the Irish units held sports in the afternoon, which I attended. On Sunday the 19th, I said Mass in my tent for the Yeomanry, and on the following Tuesday, at Father Bowes' request, I held a voluntary service for the Royal Irish. Having heard Confessions in their camp the previous evening, the early morning Mass and Communion were both well attended.

The same afternoon I lunched at the headquarters of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, where I first made acquaintance with Lieutenant McCarthy O'Leary, the Adjutant. He was a son of Colonel McCarthy O'Leary, the hero of Spion Kop, whom I had met years before.

The O.C. of the battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Orpen Palmer, invited me to dine on the following Thursday. This invitation I gladly accepted, but I was obliged to

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decline later, on account of a telephone message from the Brigade, instructing me to proceed to Stavros the same day. The message further instructed Major Shuttleworth to supply bivouac sheets for myself and my servant, as well as a pack-horse.

The pack-horse was duly provided, but there was no pack-saddle with it. The extra animal, as one might have expected, was anything but the pick of the Squadron mounts. He was just a common stocky chestnut pony, with a hard mouth, and short unpleasant pace and temper. On account of his appearance and character we called him " Red Ginger ", and he fully lived up to his name. He was the sort of animal no one would have cared to ride, and none could have been found to fall in love with him. Tugby, I fancy, from the beginning took a distinct aversion to him. However, there he was, and we had to make the best of him. With a pack-saddle, if such could be got, he might be really useful, in spite of appearances. There was also the consideration that he enhanced our importance; with transport of our own, we seemed to become a sort of self-contained cavalry unit—in fact, a more or less independent half-section.

Before leaving on Thursday morning for Stavros, I had occasion to visit Colonel Vaughan, the A.A.G. of the 27th Division. Of course he knew nothing of Chaplains' pack-horses or pack-saddles, but he kindly suggested that the Division would be glad of my services, if I cared to take on the Royal Irish Regiment. At the same time he mentioned that the Yeomanry were about to move to the front, and that the infantry would follow on later. In the circumstances, I thanked him, but explained that, for the present at least, I felt I ought to remain with my old mounted Brigade, especially if they were likely to be involved in any immediate fighting.

I had only four days with " D " Squadron at Stavros, but they have left very pleasant recollections. The place is amongst the most beautiful in Macedonia, and I was fortunate enough to see it at the best time of the year. It is situated at the mouth of a river which joins Lake Beshik

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with the sea. On either side of the gorge through which the river flows are foot-hills and wooded ravines, bounded on north and south by high mountains and plateaux. Our camp was near the river bank, pitched on a slope of land from which water seemed to ooze perpetually. There appeared to be springs and rivulets everywhere.

The camp, in consequence, was pretty well water-logged, and even the floor of the headquarters mess was not without puddles. But these minor inconveniences were more than compensated for by the happy comradeship which prevailed in the Squadron. Captain D'Arcy Clark was our O.C., and with him were Lieutenants A. R. Willan, W. D. Blatch, J. Rogers, A. G. Burdett, W. M. B. Fielding, and C. A. Branfill. A more congenial and cheery set of young officers one could not have desired to meet.

The country was rugged and mountainous, so horses required some time to become used to it. The Squadron horses were by now well trained, and almost as sure-footed as the native donkeys, or our own imported mules. As my grey mare from the Brigade, a fine old hunter, was regarded as insufficiently familiar with the terrain, I was provided by Captain Clark with one of his own ponies; and Lance-Corporal A. Webster, the Captain's groom and orderly, was deputed to look after myself and my mount.

I remember that my first day was spent riding with Captain Clark round our trenches to the north of the camp, along Brown Hill and Four Tree Hill, and back by the 83rd Brigade Headquarters. We dined in the evening with Captain Stavely, R.N., on board H.M.S. *Endymion*. I had never dined on a British man-of-war before, and I quite enjoyed the experience, which was subsequently repeated on two or three occasions, when, on visiting Salonika, I was entertained by Colonel John Noble on board H.M.S. *Lord Nelson*, the *Exmouth* and the *Agamemnon*.

The Colonel belonged to the Royal Marines, and was the brother of a school companion and lifelong friend of

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mine, Robert E. Noble, now a puisne-judge in the British West Indies. Colonel Noble returned to England later on, and died at Woolwich in consequence of war service. He was a highly esteemed and extremely popular officer.

The next day was Saturday, and I rode out again in the morning with Captain Clark and Lieutenant Rogers, to visit Maslar Troop.

Our way lay farther over the mountains, and the track in places was exceedingly precipitous. At one point it took the form of a passage, about the length of a cricket pitch, along a ledge little more than a foot wide, with a wall of cliff on one side and a sheer fall to a mountain torrent twenty or thirty feet below. It recalled to me the passage of the *mauvais pas* in Switzerland between the Rhone and Rhine Glaciers, which I had made many years before. Then I did actually slip over the precipice, and recovered my footing only by chance, which I still regard as coming near to the miraculous. This time the skill and responsibility rested with the horse. I looked straight ahead, dropped the reins on his neck, and gave him full freedom. I remember feeling the animal's flanks trembling in a quite unmistakable and alarming manner. We got across all right, however, but like the "wise men" in the Gospel, we were careful to return another way.

In the afternoon I visited the Naval Division, which was stationed a mile or two up the valley, to arrange for some of the units to attend my service the following morning in the Yeomanry camp. Punctually to time, Major Edwards arrived the next morning with a large contingent, and conducted the music of our Sunday service, which was held in the open, and concluded with the National Anthem.

Orders had arrived by Saturday for "D" Squadron to proceed on the following Thursday to Langavuk, in order to replace a Surrey Yeomanry Squadron as Divisional Cavalry. It was also known that the Brigade had moved on towards Kukus. I now realized that I must

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prepare to get on the road, and obtain a pack-saddle by some means.

Our Quartermaster-Sergeant, Sergeant-Major Warner, had done all he could, and had sent an indent to Army Ordnance at Salonika. But all was in vain. G.H.Q. simply refused to recognize a pack-saddle as being "authorized equipment" for an Army Chaplain; when it was explained that I actually had a pack-horse, even the existence of the pack-horse was ignored. It was not "on the strength", consequently I was not entitled to its saddle, and that was the official end of the matter.

The only way out of the difficulty was to order a Greek pack-saddle, which at the best is a clumsy wooden contrivance. For this purpose I started off again on Monday morning, this time by a safe track, for the village of Maslar which I had previously visited, where a reliable Greek harness-maker happened to reside. The bargain was struck, and the saddle was promised to be delivered on Thursday morning at a point on the road a few miles from our camp on the way between Stavros and Langavuk.

The Greek, faithful to his word, met me with the saddle at the place and time appointed, and fixed it on the back of "Red Ginger". Then we proceeded on our journey independently of the Squadron, and reached Langavuk late in the afternoon of Thursday. Here I decided to wait over Sunday, for the sake of providing service on that day for the troops in the neighbourhood.

On the following Monday morning, April 6th, we—that is, Tugby and myself—started off on our lone trek to rejoin the Brigade. The first day's journey led us over the hills by way of Jerakaru, Dogandzi, Hortiach, and Eurenjik to the rest camp at Karassi close by Salonika. From Dogandzi the road became a mule track, and continued as such for some miles along the slope of the hills overlooking the lake and plain of Langaza.

Here, while we stopped to admire the scenery, "Red Ginger" gave us the slip, and for the next quarter of an hour the beauty of the landscape no longer interested us.

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Our pack-horse, with his pack all awry, was galloping off towards the lakes, while we two, scarcely less awry, and looking more like American cowboys than members of the British Army, in slouch hats and shirt sleeves, were scouring round in different directions in order to circumvent and arrest him.

We had not seen a soldier or a native since we started, but at this embarrassing moment who should appear on the horizon but a General and his staff. It might have been the G.O.C. and his entourage, but it turned out to be Brigadier-General Nichol of the 10th Division, with his A.D.C. and an orderly.

Fortunately we caught "Red Ginger" shortly after this untoward apparition, and the General and his staff moved away without saying anything—as far as we knew. The rest of the journey was accomplished without any further regrettable incident, and we arrived in time for dinner in the evening at the rest camp.

I devoted the next day and the morning of the following Wednesday to shopping with my servant in Salonika. A parting purchase was a fine bivouac tent, which I obtained for fifty drachmae from a Greek tent-maker in a poor quarter of the town. On the completion of the purchase, the Greek, with the assistance of a few bystanders, obligingly made up the canvas and poles of the tent into a convenient package, and fixed it on to our pack-saddle with the rest of our luggage. The party of natives was profuse in civility, and demonstrative in professions of loyalty to M. Venizelos and the cause of the Allies. Everything seemed propitious, and we parted in the most amicable manner.

But, alas for the fickleness of fortune! Scarcely had we proceeded two hundred yards, when we discovered to our amazement that the carefully (?) secured package had vanished. Where had the whole caboodle gone? We returned immediately to question our friends—but they, too, had disappeared, except the Greek, who shrugged his shoulders ominously, and gesticulated suspicions of his erstwhile assistants. The place, he declared, was infested

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with rogues, and it was hard for an honest man to live and conduct business in such a vagabond neighbourhood. At first he appeared simply desolated and dumbfounded at the news of our misfortune, but his sympathy soon took on a practical form, and expressed itself in an earnest desire to make good the loss. Would I accept another and better tent as a gift in return for the bare cost of the material—sixty drachmae?

It was difficult to withstand such sympathy and generosity. Besides, I was bent on having a bivouac at all costs, and there was no longer time to make further search in the shops, most of which I had already explored in the course of the morning. Accordingly I smothered resentment and suspicion, and consented to the bargain with the best grace I could. Then we moved off again, but this time we kept an alert eye on tent "number two" until well out of the city.

We were now once more on our way to rejoin the Brigade, and after stopping at Karassi for lunch, we started along the Seres road for Kukus. The first stage of the journey ended at Guvesne, where we halted and stayed the night with "B" Squadron of the Surrey Yeomanry. The next morning, leaving the main road, we continued our trek north-west, across the series of low wooded hills and plains which form part of the watershed of the Galico.

There were few villages on the way, and it was difficult to obtain precise information. However, we picked out the best tracks we could, and managed to reach Kukus before nightfall. The Brigade then directed us to the camp of the Derbyshires, which was pitched in the bed of the Spant River, a tributary of the Galico, at a point two miles north-east of the town.

This town of Kukus or Kilchis was the centre of a pre-war prosperous tobacco industry, and once a famous rendezvous for Greek and Bulgarian revolutionaries. It lay on the Guvesne-Janes road, at a point where that road is crossed by another running north to Snevce. Since both roads were principal traffic routes, and the town itself

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was the most important in the district, we often had occasion to visit it.

As far as I can remember, the Kukus of our time consisted chiefly of a long straggling street, with two attempts at side streets, running right and left at the main crossing. Behind an open space near the end of the town, and by the turning to the left, stood the French Convent School and the Catholic Church. These together formed a fairly good block of buildings. The only other large buildings were a few pretentious edifices on the western slopes of the hills above the principal street. Small native stores, cabarets and dwelling-houses lined either side of the main thoroughfare, and stood well back from the road, like some of the shops in Mile End. The walls of most of the houses were plastered with dung-cakes—a chief source of fuel in the neighbourhood—and festooned with tobacco leaves exposed to the sun to dry. This useful expedient for drying the leaves also gave a festive appearance to the place.

The cabarets were typical of the country, and I often enjoyed a simple meal, sitting alone or with a companion at a rough table, while peasants in the same room, ate, smoked, and drank "mastics". Entertainment was provided in a bare kitchen on the ground floor, and one simply walked in and helped oneself to the various stews and dishes, which stood cooking on a wide stove at the farther end of the room. It was an excellent method, and overcame an all too common difficulty of having to choose food from unintelligible bills of fare when visiting hotels and restaurants.

In America, I re-discovered this simple Balkan principle in the elaborate system of Cafeteria prevailing through all the large cities. Why cannot the idea be introduced into England? No prizes are offered for the best answer, but only a lucky chance of a fortune.

Of the disposition and number of the forces opposed to us, little was known except that they were reasonably near and made occasional cavalry sorties. A

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French Brigade of Chasseurs d'Afrique, on our left, also reported that there were bands of Comitadji in the neighbourhood.

On the following day, April 7th, the regiment was ordered to fill a gap between the Sherwoods and the French Chasseurs at Janes. Strangely enough, this order was cancelled at midnight from England, and superseded by another the next morning, directing our " A " Squadron to reinforce the S.R.Y. in the neighbourhood of Irikli, six miles farther north.

Our position was now on the extreme east of the Brigade support line, which extended westward as far as the town of Kilindir on the Kilindir River. The advanced line, consisting of scattered outposts, occupied the high ground in front, called the Gola Ridge, after the village of Gola on its crest.

The French line, with headquarters at Hirsova, led among a further reach of low hills, between which the Kilindir River flowed north into the lake. These hills, and the river between them, which bore a close resemblance to a typical Scottish glen, separated our Gola Ridge from the mountains protecting Doiran town for the enemy.

The third stage of the war had now begun. This period (April-June, 1916) was marked by a gradual movement of the allied troops towards the Greek frontier, for the purpose of establishing a forward position, which could serve either for offence or defence, according to circumstances.

For the Yeomanry, whose duty was to keep in constant touch with the enemy during these operations, the three months were more than usually busy and exciting. They were also, I recall, days of extraordinary quick changes and rapid movements. A whistle would sound to " strike camp ", and we were packed up, and away on our horses to another hillside or nullah, in anything from an hour to a couple of hours at the utmost. I shared to the full in these exciting changes, moving from camp to camp with the rest. In addition I had my duty move-

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ments from regiment to regiment, and from squadron to squadron.

Each morning our patrols would mount and start away early, sword on one side of saddle and rifle in its bucket on the other, to surprise and ambush the Uhlan cavalry, who, with spear and carbine, were equally active on their part in the pursuit of a similar enterprise.

Sometimes our parties remained out for two or three days; more often they returned the same evening. Frequently they brought back thrilling stories of adventure—encounters with spies, sharp skirmishes with the enemy, and hair-breadth escapes. Occasionally they met with reverses and casualties. For the most part, however, they were successful, and took prisoners. Invariably they gathered useful information.

The scene of these activities was a broad expanse of wooded hills and rolling plains, at the northern extremity of the Galico valley, where that plain flanks Lake Doiran on the south-east, and at the point where the Greek, Bulgar and Serbian frontiers met.

This " no-man's-land " of the Gola Ridge, with its steep slopes, secret ravines, and pleasant plain stretching south from the lake, afforded a happy hunting ground for the British, French and German cavalry patrols. From its northern edge, where the ground fell gradually till it reached the level of Lake Doiran only two miles away, it also afforded a wonderful view of the surrounding country.

Half-way down the slope, nestling in a clump of trees, which continued in a line of thick wood for a mile and a half towards the lake, six miles in length and almost oval in shape, appeared the deserted hamlet of Pataros. The sole occupants of the place at the time were a couple of Greek policemen, on whom we perforce relied for information of enemy patrols in the district. Later we discovered that their loyalty was somewhat divided—one being pro-British and the other pro-German.

Two miles to the right along the ridge, and one mile below the village of Gola, was another village, called

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Sirlova; while beyond it, towards the eastern end of the lake, and well in the centre of the plain, lay the small town of Brest. All three places were held by the Bulgars.

On our left in the distance could be seen the Kilindir River, with the railway running from Kilindir through the Galico valley to Salonika. Surmounting this was yet another cluster of hills, which dropped abruptly down to the shore of the lake, and commanded a full view of Doiran station, three miles from the town. These hills, as we were soon to discover, were likewise occupied by the enemy.

Still farther on our left, and covering the approach to Doiran from the south, were the group of high mountains which, later on in the war, became all too well known to us under the familiar names of Petit Couronne, Grand Couronne, and the Pips. They are really spurs of the central mountain mass of the Beles or Belashitza range, which under different names extends from the western extremity of the lake, along the edge of the Butkova and Struma valleys to the sea.

Through the whole length of this solid mountain wall, which forms a natural barrier between Bulgaria and Macedonia, there is only one pass—at Demirrhissar, and this was securely guarded on the Greek side by the strong modern fortress of Rupel. Shortly after our arrival at Gola, however, the Greeks, at the instigation of King Constantine, treacherously surrendered the fortress to the Bulgars, thus giving them direct access to the Struma valley, and seriously endangering our positions.

On April 26th, a reconnaissance—for the purpose of discovering the position of enemy guns suspected to be in the hills above Doiran station—was carried out by two squadrons of the South Notts Hussars and a squadron of the Derbyshire Yeomanry.

I was with the South Notts at the time, near Irikli, and took the opportunity to accompany them. Our contingent, including "B" and "C" Squadrons and headquarters, started off soon after breakfast, and reached the assembly point on the Ridge, eight miles

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away, early in the forenoon. On arriving we dismounted, picketed our horses amongst the trees beneath the brow of the hill out of sight, while we ourselves lay on the top to observe. After an hour of silent watching, signs of activity began, and parties commenced to mount and move off in different directions. I attached myself to a patrol led by Lieutenant Repton, which made straight for Pataros and the wood.

The Greek Police signal, a white flag, indicated that the wood was clear of the enemy. Nevertheless, we proceeded cautiously. Beyond the wood was a swollen stream, with a stone bridge in bad repair. While crossing this, we had to avoid several shell-holes.

On the other side of the bridge we were joined by Lieutenant Lawrence's troop, and with them formed up into three sections in extended line. Keeping this formation, the whole line galloped straight for Doiran station, two miles over the plain. I rode with the centre section.

On reaching the station, we came under a fairly sharp fire from a nest of machine-guns half-way up one of the hills. Pi-e-e-e-ing! Pi-e-e-e-ing! sang the bullets, some passing overhead, some dropping short, and some piercing the woodwork and corrugated iron of the railway station. It was like being exposed to the commencement of a heavy hailstorm. We immediately took cover. Lieutenant Repton, desirous of reconnoitring farther, rode off along the railway line in the direction of the firing. After he had gone a couple of hundred yards, I mounted and followed him.

Before long he was galloping back in hot haste. "What's the matter?" I shouted. There was no answer. So I also turned and galloped back as fast as I could on his heels. The fact was we had come under fresh rifle fire at close range, and the sand was flying up in little spurts a few feet behind us.

On our return to the station we were surprised to find Major Fairburn's "B" Squadron there. The presence of this squadron—which we had expected to remain in support, and only to advance in case of necessity—caused

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us some embarrassment. The large number of troops in the little station was likely to attract shell fire from Doiran, in addition to the machine-gun and rifle fire to which we were already exposed.

Accordingly, orders were given to retire independently, and concentrate at a given point between the bridge and the wood. It was a fine sight, and would have made a splendid picture for the " movies ", to see the Yeomanry with their heads and bodies leaning over their horses' necks flying across the plain. I was reminded of the scene once or twice later on in France, when, in the course of infantry engagements, cavalry patrols appeared suddenly in close proximity and were compelled to retire rapidly.

At the stream a choice had to be made between the passage of the bridge or the water. Remembering the holes in the bridge, and following the example of the majority, I plunged straight into the water and got safely across. With the single exception of a trooper, who was swept away with his horse by the current, we all crossed safely. This accident, and the loss of one of the Derbyshire Yeomanry horses, shot by the enemy, were the only casualties that day.

Adventures of this sort were common enough at the time, and associated in my mind with one of them, was the loss of my pack-horse.

I was returning alone, mounted for a change on " Red Ginger ", from another reconnaissance, marked by the capture of an Austrian Uhlan, complete with helmet and lance, when my horse got entangled with a telephone wire and bolted down a ravine. Slithering on a rock, he fell on his side, and pinned me beneath him. Then he got up and galloped off again, dragging me several yards. When I found him, he was badly gashed, and his head and forelegs were bleeding.

Remounting, I managed to get home, and after a twenty-four hour " slack " I was fit again; but not so " Red Ginger ", who had to be destroyed a few weeks later. I never succeeded in wangling another pack-horse,

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though I made more than one endeavour to do so at Remounts. My case now rested on the possession of a "pack-saddle", as before it had rested on the possession of a "pack-horse". But where had I obtained the "pack-saddle"? If I had got it from the Army, it must be due to a mistake and should be returned forthwith to Ordnance. If it was private property, it was no concern of the Army and gave me no claim to the pack-horse. To solve the problem, and avoid complications, I sold the wretched saddle to a Greek for five drachmae.

The loss of my private transport happened to synchronize with the termination of the three months of movement, which, as I have already said, marked the third stage of the war. This disappointing handicap to my mobility appropriately closes this chapter.

MAIN STREET, KUKUS.

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CHAPTER V

The Struma Sector—The Bulgar advance of July, 1916—Malarial fever — A novel altar — Cabbages and kings — Recapture of Monastir—The attack on the villages—Bishop Keating—I return to Salonika.

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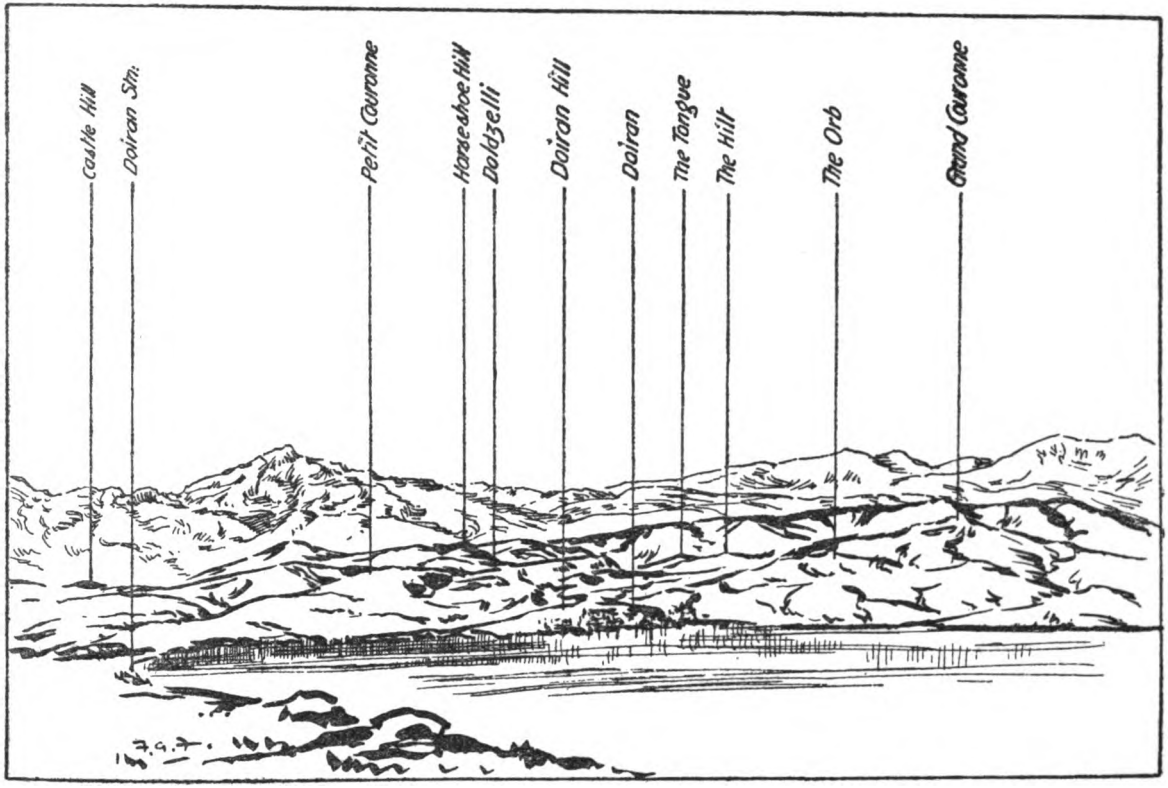

LOOKING NORTH-WEST OVER LAKE DOIRAN.

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CHAPTER V

THE handing over of Rupel by the Greek frontier guards, on May 26th, 1916, completely altered the strategic position, and led to a more drastic policy on the part of the Allies.

The new policy commenced with the seizing of all communications, and the proclamation of martial law throughout the Salonika area. The next step was the despatch of a diplomatic note to the Greek Government, demanding an immediate demobilization of the Royal Army, and a promise from the King to adhere strictly to the spirit and letter of his previously declared neutrality. This note was complied with on June 21st. After that, further military measures followed, to forestall a now definitely anticipated enemy offensive.

In addition to the French and British patrols, established in the spring with Kilindir and Kukus as headquarters, Infantry Divisions were now sent to occupy the south bank of the Struma, and also to hold advance positions on the Doiran-Vardar Sector. At the same time, our Yeomanry were ordered to co-operate with the infantry regiments on the line of the river. Such was the general condition of affairs at the close of the spring of 1916.

The next, or fourth stage of the war covered only the two summer months of July and August. Yet it proved an eventful period, comprising as it did a notable Bulgar advance, and a successful counter-offensive on our part.

The Bulgars started to make their advance early in July, and by the end of the month they had pushed south as far as Koritza and Lake Ostrova on the west, and Drama and Kavalla on the east, thus seriously menacing our flanks.

Here was a danger that had to be dealt with without delay. We were also pledged to bring pressure to bear on the Bulgarian front, eight days before Rumania

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should enter the war on our side, which she had engaged to do by the middle of August. These and other reasons compelled General Sarrail, the Commander-in-Chief, to decide on undertaking an immediate offensive campaign.

Though the possible necessity of this campaign had been foreseen, and prepared for as far as circumstances would allow, the actual enterprise had to be undertaken in haste, and was fraught with exceptional hazards. In its planning and execution the French Staff and Army were fortunate in having the assistance of Lieutenant-General Milne, who, on May 25th, had taken over the command of the British Salonika Force, and was now able to offer five highly trained and fully equipped British Divisions for active service in the field.

The British contingent, with the more numerous forces of the French Army, and some 80,000 Serbian soldiers, made up in all 308,000 effectives. This total was later considerably increased by the timely arrival of the very strong Italian 35th Division, and two Russian Brigades. The Russians, owing to the difficulties of the revolution in their country, served only for a short period. The Italian Division, on the contrary, with its regiments of Alpini and Bergsaglieri, remained with us to the end, and rendered invaluable service by taking over the main part of the important Krusha-Balkan Sector, from Kopriva as far north as Butkovo Lake. Still the odds were greatly against us, both in the superior numbers of the enemy and in their better acclimatization to the country.

Our offensive began on the morning of August 10th, by a heavy bombardment of Doiran. It ended on the 18th, with the capture of Tortue Hill and Horse-shoe Hill, two forward spurs of the mountains which I have already described as guarding the town from the south.

La Tortue fell to the French after an engagement concerning which I have no details, but Horse-shoe Hill was a British victory. The position, as I came to learn afterwards, was an exceptionally strong one, and it was stoutly defended to the last day by the enemy. It was finally captured by the 7th Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry,

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who made a very gallant attack in the night, and drove off the enemy at the point of the bayonet. Later on in the war I was privileged to serve with this regiment, and I can vouch for their skill and courage in action.

To counter these immediate successes, the Bulgars, on the 18th of August, launched a surprise attack against the Serbians on their long line to the west of the Vardar. This attack was adroitly carried out, and was everywhere successful. North of Florina the few Serbian outposts were at once driven back, and the towns of Florina and Banitza were taken on August 19th. The next day, August 20th, the rest of the Serbian Army was forced to withdraw to the mountains beyond Lake Ostrovo, where, thanks to large French and Russian reinforcements hurriedly sent to their assistance, they were eventually enabled to make a stand.

For the present, however, it was impossible for us to continue the offensive we had begun; the most we could now hope to do was to hold our actual line intact. Meanwhile more and more French and other Allied troops kept moving to the west, until only our two British Army Corps remained to guard the whole of the Eastern front, from the Vardar to the mouth of the Struma. As this line, besides being very long, was faced at many places by large enemy forces, the work of guarding it necessitated constant vigilance, and strenuous military activities of varied character.

On the Struma Sector, extending from Orljak to Orfano at the mouth of the river, and occupied by the XVI Corps, our troops were engaged in constant patrols, and frequent fights with bands of Bulgars who made raids from the hills, entrenching themselves in the villages, and on the plains north and south of Lake Tahinos. These scraps with enemy raiders sometimes developed into serious engagements. One, in which our Yeomanry Brigade distinguished itself, is referred to in my Diary under August 20th:

"Heavy fighting took place to-day near Kopriva, in connection with a strong reconnaissance made by the

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Derbyshire Yeomanry, in co-operation with an Infantry Regiment, to ascertain the strength and disposition of the Bulgars across the river. In the course of this fighting, a very gallant troop action occurred, in which Lieutenant W. M. B. Feilden led twenty-five men of 'A' Squadron in a charge against three hundred of the enemy. The engagement resulted in almost the entire loss of the troop. The casualties were four men killed, six wounded, and ten captured. Only five out of the twenty-five engaged returned safely. All the horses were shot down."

This record speaks for itself!

On the shorter Doiran-Vardar Sector, held by the XIIth Corps, the conditions of warfare, if more static, were certainly not less arduous. Here, by means of regular bombardments and well-planned infantry raids on the Macukovo salient, our troops held up a force of 30,000 Bulgars, Germans and Turks, all through the campaign until the final advance.

To appreciate these military achievements at all justly, it is necessary to bear in mind that they were accomplished by troops, thousands of miles from civilization, and newly exposed to the devastating effects of a semi-tropical and fever-infested climate. An idea may be gathered of what the ravages of disease were, from the fact that, in the summer of 1916, over 8,000 cases of malarial fever, from the three British Divisions on the Struma front, passed in one day through our Casualty Clearing Stations.

I began my experience of the Struma valley towards the middle of June at Orljak, where I stayed for a few days with the Sherwood Rangers. Their camp was just above the level of the plain, and near to the camp of the XVIth Corps Headquarters, who also had an O.P. on a hill close by, called Spion Kop.

The position at Orljak, taking in as it did the bridge on the direct road to Rupel, only thirteen miles north across the plain, was of great strategic importance. The scenery of the locality was also particularly interesting and impressive. On a clear day, from the hills immediately above our camp, we could distinctly see the famous Rupel Pass, with its great fortress and magnificent back-

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ground of snow-capped mountains. The whole presented a glorious picture of natural grandeur and mighty defence, which could not fail to make a deep impression of the immense difficulties that confronted us.

On June 15th, we moved to the neighbourhood of Mekes, ten miles south-east of Orljak, and established a camp near the village of Kopaki, on the north bank of a little tributary of the Struma, at a point where the stream is spanned by a slender wooden bridge leading to the village half a mile to the south. Our camp, which later developed into a base of operations for the Brigade, formed part of a tract of cultivated land, only recently abandoned and still containing many acres of vines and fruit trees, with shocks of wheat standing in places.

On the eve of the Feast of Corpus Christi, I conceived the idea of piling up some of the sheaves into the form of an altar, with a board and stone laid on top. The plan was successfully achieved, and on the morning of the Feast, June 21st, I said Mass for the troops on this new model altar. Lieutenant Kerr of the S.R.Y., who was always assiduous in helping me with my services, served the Mass. It was a glorious summer morning, and I think we were all devotionally impressed by the symbolism. I used the same altar daily afterwards, for quite a considerable period.

The particular place I selected for my dwelling was a grassy spot beneath a cluster of trees, a short distance from the main camp. In this delightful and shady retreat, my batman, Tugby, put up our bivouacs, and made everything as comfortable as possible. Somehow we expected a long stay, and in fact we continued in the same place for practically all the summer.

Shortly after settling down in this isolated position, we were ordered to take precautions against danger from Comitadji who were reported to be in the vicinity. The precaution we took was to sleep away from our tents in the open for the next few nights—Tugby, with loaded rifle beside him, and I with my service revolver and his bayonet, which he insisted on leaving by the pillow of

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my sleeping bag. With the revolver in an emergency, I might possibly have succeeded in damaging somebody; but as for the bayonet, I should certainly have been utterly unable to nerve myself to make use of such a bloodthirsty weapon. Fortunately no Comitadji arrived to disturb our slumbers, and we soon forgot all about them.

In addition to the fruits which were ripening—grapes, currants, melons, mulberries, figs, apricots, peaches, all in their season—the camp offered the attraction, for the first few weeks, of fine swimming pools in the river. These, however, dried up all too soon under the scorching summer sun. Then, those of us who were not satisfied with tubbing in small artificial dams, had to go farther afield for our bathing. My duties fortunately demanded frequent visits to the Struma, and in that broad river, the ancient Strymon, I enjoyed many a prolonged bathe with my batman, or with parties of fellow-officers, in spite of the barbed wire in places, and the constant danger of Bulgar bullets from snipers who infested the opposite banks.

The long evenings which followed these summer days also had their joys; and the evening meal, usually taken in the open, was always a cheery function, despite the constant menace of malaria. Jovial conversation, yarns, or impromptu songs, enlivened the evening until ten o'clock or so, after which cards usually formed the chief attraction—but not for me. I only learned one game in my life, Vingt-et-un, and played badly at that! Accordingly, when the cards appeared, I would repair to my encampment, where Tugby was dutifully awaiting me.

The idea, of course, was to turn in, as we both had to rise early in the morning; but on very hot nights we would sit up till such time as the temperature permitted the possibility of sleep. Tugby was musical and often regaled me with snatches of popular ditties. "I want to go home" and "Take me back to Blighty" were favourites in his repertoire. Though, I fear, I did not fully share the sentiments expressed, I liked the lilt of these refrains, and appreciated the yearnings of youth for home and beauty.

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At other times we would sit watching the flashes of the guns from over the hills, and

> " . . . talk of many things :
> Of shoes, and ships, and sealing-wax,
> Of cabbages and kings,
> And why the sea is boiling hot,
> And whether pigs have wings."

After these intimate and wise conversations, we would turn into our beds and sleep soundly till morning.

On July 19th, a few cases of malaria broke out amongst the Derbyshires at Kopriva. This was the first appearance of fever in the Brigade. The daily toll, however, soon assumed alarming proportions. In the regiment I have just mentioned " a great increase of fever " was reported on the 23rd. On the 24th, the report was " thirty-six cases to hospital "; whilst on the next four days the average was eighteen. So that within the first week of the outbreak of the epidemic, one hundred and sixty men from this regiment alone were sent down to hospital.

The South Notts, who had to be amalgamated with the Derbyshires to form a complete regiment, seem to have suffered equally. The havoc in the Brigade Headquarters was proportionately the greatest of all. By the 31st July, our Brigadier and Brigade-Major were both invalided to the Base, and only twenty out of sixty-five of all ranks remained for duty. Probably the Sherwood Rangers, with whom I was, came off best. At least we continued as an integral unit, though very greatly depleted in strength.

The fifth stage of the war (September-November, 1916) witnessed a complete thrust back of the recent Bulgar offensive, and the recapture of Monastir by the Allies.

This favourable turn of events started early in September, when the Serbian First and Second Armies, after coming to a stand north-west of Ostrova, commenced, with the help of the French and Russians, to counter-attack and advance against the enemy. The new offensive, conceived in a spirit of high patriotic adventure, and carried out by the Serbs with superb dash and courage,

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at once met with rapid and deserved success, which continued to the end.

In less than three weeks, the First Army had recrossed the Mala Reka, and by September 18th, it had entered Florina. On the same day the Second Army, which had been fighting its way farther west over the Moglena Mountains, achieved a signal victory by successfully storming the great Kaimactchalin peak, the highest point of the range (8,284 feet), and the dominating position of the whole sector.

These splendid achievements opened the way to Lake Mala Prespa, the north-east extremity of which was reached on October 3rd. From there the combined forces pushed right and left along the Czerna, where the river makes a wide loop and encloses the important corner of Serbia previously referred to as the Czerna bend.

On both lines of advance, the Serbian Armies experienced the strongest and most determined resistance. Still, they gained ground steadily, and, after crossing the river at two places, entered Brod on October 8th. At length, after five more days of stubborn fighting, they succeeded in regaining the whole of this much-disputed corner of their country.

Even this was not the end of their effort, and in the succeeding weeks they won several more hard-fought battles. To the French, however, were reserved the decisive victories of Porodin and Velushina, which immediately caused the withdrawal of the enemy behind the line of the Bistrica Stream on November 14th, and a few days later led him finally to evacuate Monastir on November 19th. After this, the bad weather which had already set in some time ago, put a stop to this phase of intensive fighting.

The British contribution to the offensive just described, consisted of a number of holding attacks, delivered with hammer-like effect, all along the eastern sector. In the carrying out of these attacks, the Yeomanry co-operated with the infantry, and, as I am reminded by an entry in my Diary under the date Friday, September 15th, 1916,

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shared in some thrilling adventures. The entry is as follows:

"To-day two squadrons of the Derby Yeomanry, and two squadrons of the Lothian Border Horse, both dismounted, co-operated with the 29th Infantry Brigade in a demonstration against the Bulgars. I joined the D.I.Y., and crossed the Struma with Major Carleton's Squadron at eleven a.m. We got back to camp by eleven p.m. While the 29th Brigade captured Zalmanak and some other enemy outposts, we took the two villages of Kata and Ana Godeli."

These are the only details recorded, but I recollect quite a number of exciting circumstances which gave zest and enjoyment to the event thus briefly noted.

First, there was constant sniping, and consequently the risk of being hit at any time by directly aimed bullets or chance ricochets. Another element of excitement was contributed by our uncertainty as to the enemy's whereabouts. In the tangle of country we had to pass through, he might be in hiding anywhere.

Moreover, we had to keep moving forwards, in order to reach the neighbourhood of the villages, fourteen miles away, before dark—the risks, of course, increasing every yard we advanced from our camp.

For the most part, the way led through a wilderness of thick scrub and underwood. Sometimes we had to penetrate maize fields with the corn rising several feet overhead, each of us having to explore and force a track for himself. In the thickets of wood or corn, there was always an off-chance of being lost or getting left behind. In consequence, on emerging into the open, it was often necessary to retake one's bearings, in order to get back to one's party.

All this was a spur to alertness, and added to the interest of the march. But the climax, as well as the anti-climax, of the collective exploits of the day culminated in the attacks on the villages. As the two attacks were simultaneous, and almost identical in their results, I will confine my description to the one with which I went forward.

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Just before sunset, I found myself with Major Carleton and his squadron lying in the fields a couple of hundred yards from the outskirts of the village of Kata Godeli. There we remained nearly forty minutes, expecting any moment the order to charge and capture the place.

Meanwhile a tornado of shrapnel from our Mountain Artillery, who may or may not have known exactly where we were located, screeched and screamed immediately above our heads. This is no exaggerated statement. I can hear to-day the swish caused by the bullets as they cut the leaves and upper twigs of the low trees beneath which I was lying, and I can still see the debris falling around me. Beyond, in the rickety-rackety ramshackle village, death and destruction appeared to be almost inevitable.

At length the artillery ceased firing; there was a tense electric pause . . . then the word of command—"Fix bayonets! . . . Charge!"

To a man we sprang to our feet, and with a clamour of cheering rushed forward. Was it to death or glory? No matter! England expects . . . Theirs not to reason why . . .

Alas! when we reached our objective, the hurrahs and huzzas suddenly ceased; high heroism yielded first to amazement, and then to common diversion. For, lo and behold . . . the enemy had vanished! Every man, woman and child had deserted the place and gone into the woods before the bombardment began. In vain we scoured the streets, broke into houses, searched premises. The only occupants—besides the poultry we scared in the hen-roosts—were a few stray goats and donkeys, grazing unconcernedly by the roadside. "Finish—Johnny"—and our glory too!

On our way back through the fields, some of the party, it must be confessed, vented their outraged feelings by striking matches and firing haystacks. Others used their scanty ration of matches more wisely to light cigarettes, which they smoked surreptitiously.

Meanwhile the wily Bulgar, with something of the

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instinct of the up-to-date Pressman, was busy observing and reporting. At least, I infer this from the description of the taking of the villages contained in a document handed in to our camp a few days later, by an ex-Greek soldier, acting as a British agent in the enemy lines. The description is as follows: "The Bulgars fled panic-stricken from the English who bayoneted fifty of them. Then the English walked about, striking matches and setting fire to the villages, whilst smoking cigars!"

With the end of September and the beginning of October, there developed a new phase in our offensive operations on the Struma. Instead of the usual raids, concerted attacks were made by considerable bodies of troops, under artillery protection from the hills. The object of these attacks was to take, and hold for a time, certain forward positions which the enemy had recently occupied. This new phase naturally afforded greater opportunities for the infantry, and less scope for the cavalry, who gradually took up again their patrol and Corps duties.

Our first intimation of the change of tactics was on September 30th, when we were awakened in the early hours of the morning by a heavy bombardment from our artillery in the direction of Orljak. This bombardment was followed immediately by an attack of the 28th Division, which was a complete success, the infantry crossing the river and firmly establishing themselves in several villages, which they continued to hold in spite of numerous counter-attacks, in which the Bulgars suffered heavy losses from the fire of our guns. By the end of the day their casualties exceeded a thousand, including one hundred and seventy-six prisoners we had taken, whilst our own losses in killed, wounded and prisoners amounted to four hundred. The fighting continued intermittently during the next two days, during which we made still further progress.

In the course of the first day of the engagement, the Derbyshires and South Notts crossed the river in order to create a diversion, and in the action which followed,

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two troopers of the S.N.H. were killed. One of them was Trooper Darker, a young lad of eighteen. He was an officer's servant, and a general favourite in the camp. He and my servant were great chums, and I myself had quite a regard for him. To all he was known as Charlie Darker. In contrast to his name and dark complexion, he was a bright attractive boy of frank and cheery disposition. He was extremely obliging to me and always assisted my servant in his spare time. As an officer's servant, his place was primarily in the camp, not in the field. However, he was too courageous to hold back, and when on this occasion his squadron was ordered to advance, he begged his officer, Major Barber, to let him accompany them. It was the poor lad's first and last experience of battle.

The same evening, as I was returning from the scene of the fighting, I stumbled across his dead body, which I just succeeded in recognizing in the darkness. My first impulse was to kneel and pray beside him. Then with the help of another, I carried him back on a stretcher to the Advance Dressing Station. It was a sad journey. The following day, Sunday, October 1st, we buried him in the camp cemetery; and my impression was that the group of officers and men gathered around that lonely grave, three thousand miles from home, was larger than usual, and that their grief was exceptionally marked. There were no more visits from our young friend, but Tugby and I never forgot him, and we often referred to "poor Charlie Darker!"

On Monday, as the fighting was still going on, I took the opportunity of riding over to the Advance Dressing Station of the 31st Field Ambulance at Sakavacha, in order to attend the wounded. There I found my friend, Captain McCarthy O'Leary. He had been pretty badly hit, but was quite cheerful, and was good enough to give me a full account of the battle and also to supply me with information as to where and how I could get in touch with the troops.

Accordingly, after taking leave of him, I rode on to

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Komarian, where I left my horse, and crossing the temporary bridge, completed the rest of the journey to the firing-line on foot.

The way through Bala and Karajakoi, two recently captured villages, was strewn with Bulgar and British dead, and at one spot eight killed of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders lay side by side.

The Bulgars, at the time of my arrival on the scene, were actually engaged in counter-attacking, and were only separated from our position by three or four hundred yards. They seemed to be scattered in groups, sheltered behind hillocks and earth defences. We, too, had a few shallow rifle-pits protected by sand-bags, but most of our men were lying more or less in the open. Rifle fire was desultory, and some shrapnel was flying about.

To protect myself against the possible charge of being a mere spectator, or idle interloper, I applied myself to the work of searching for the wounded and bringing them in on stretchers. After a couple of hours of strenuous exertion, I started back, and picked up my horse at the bridge, where I met Colonel Orpen Palmer, and Brigade-Major Butler, son of the late General Sir William Butler.

Our conversation somehow turned to the old question of my temporary transfer to the 1st Royal Irish Regiment. The Major favoured the idea, and the next day I was agreeably surprised by the receipt of a message from Colonel Graham, who commanded the battalion, inviting me to visit him at Mekes in order to fix up my transfer.

I rode over at once and found that the Colonel had already begun negotiations with G.H.Q. and only wanted to make certain of my approval. He informed me that, though he was a black Protestant, he wanted an R.C. Chaplain for his Irish Catholics, to attend their spiritual needs, and go into action with them. I expressed not only willingness, but a positive delight to serve with a Commander who took this view of a Chaplain's duties. At the same time, I suggested that the Principal Chaplain's permission might be obtained. But this course did not commend itself to the Colonel, because the Principal

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Chaplain had already deprived him of his previous Padre. All this was before the arrival of Mgr. Keating, later Bishop Keating, the popular Principal Chaplain who came out a few months later, and served with the Salonika Army for more than a year.

I am not going to attempt to offer any detailed appreciation of Bishop Keating, because he is still the Catholic Army Bishop, and might be embarrassed by the high praise which would be necessary to do him justice. All who knew him, however, will agree that he was one of the best loved and most highly esteemed of men by members of the Salonika Army—which is much to say of a Principal Chaplain of any denomination.

Negotiations were protracted. The sequel, however, was this: On Thursday the 26th, I was attached to the 82nd Brigade, and posted for duty to the 1st Royal Irish Regiment. The arrangement was simply a temporary one between the G.O.C. of my 7th Mounted Brigade and the G.O.C. 27th Division, pending confirmation by G.H.Q. Of course, the whole plan might fizzle out, but it satisfied me for the time being. The next morning, therefore, I set out, in high assurance, with my servant, two horses and two pack-mules, to join the regiment, which I was instructed to find on the east bank of the Struma opposite the village of Agomar.

On my arrival in the evening after dark, I discovered that the camp was almost hidden in the midst of the thick bush or underwood adjoining the river. This camp was truly a novelty, for instead of the usual Army bivouacs, the Irishmen had built a colony of wattled huts with neatly thatched roofs. Some had small gardens in front of them—a reminder of home!

On a tree outside the cook-house hung the dressed carcase of a wild boar, while an appetizing aroma of roast pork pervaded the air. In the soft light of the moon and stars under the trees, the camp suggested one of those Indian hunter settlements in North America, made familiar to us in youth by the stories of Fenimore Cooper.

The Colonel, a direct descendant of the famous

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Marquis of Montrose, and his officers, nearly all Ulster Protestants—the rank and file were the Catholics—gave me the warmest welcome and the best of entertainment. At dinner, roast pork was provided and served with all the culinary relishes prescribed by that prince of connoisseurs in "crackling", the immortal Charles Lamb. Other dishes followed, and whisky, coffee, liqueurs and cigars completed the celebration. It was a great evening, but as some wise person once said:

"Oft evenings glad make mornings sad."

The proverb proved too true in my case, for sadness came to me the first thing in the morning, when I received a message from G.H.Q. to report the same day for duty to the 78th Brigade, 26th Division.

This drastic and sudden order was a complete defeat of plans which had apparently succeeded. I felt it very much, and the Colonel resented it even more strongly. We both had reason to assume that the author of the change was the Principal Chaplain, who was averse to our project from the beginning. Anyhow the Colonel put the entire blame on that official, whom he there and then soundly rated, giving vent to his indignation in language befitting an officer of noble Scottish descent and fine downright character. I felt the annoyance no less, but could not express it so picturesquely.

I returned immediately to my original Brigade at Kopaki, and arranged for a short visit to Salonika, prior to taking up my new duties with the infantry. The next day, Saturday the 28th, after bidding farewell for good to my old Yeomanry friends, I started off again with my servant, the two horses, and our kit in a half-limber. The Brigadier allowed me to keep my servant but not the horses, which had to be returned to the Derbyshire Yeomanry at Kilo 69.

At the end, it was hard to part with my famous grey horse, and I asked the groom who met us to take good care of it. He was a friendly fellow, and said he would keep an eye on the old grey mare for my sake. Then I

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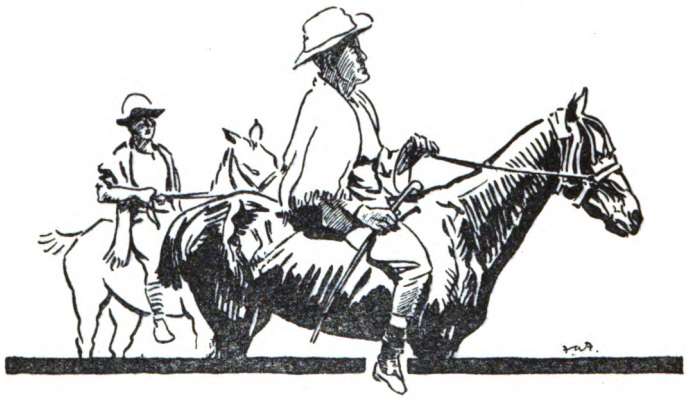
took an affectionate leave of my trusty steed. A few days afterwards I learned that the General had commandeered her for himself.

From Kilo 69 we made the rest of the journey by lorry, spending the night at the A.S.C. dump at Likovan. There I held service on Sunday morning, afterwards proceeding to Salonika, which we reached before evening.

The next day I called at G.H.Q., and interviewed Lord Granard, the Military Secretary, on the matter still uppermost in my mind. Having at one time been in command of the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Regiment, he fully sympathized with my point of view, but was unable to do anything further in the matter. The Principal Chaplain, whom I saw next day, admitted that he had caused the move, but explained that he was compelled to do so by circumstances.

On Tuesday evening, I left with my servant for Dudular station, where we slept in an outhouse with a crowd of officers and men returning from leave, and entrained at four o'clock in the morning (Wednesday, November 1st) for Janes.

Thus ended the summer and autumn of 1916, on the Struma.



BATHERS—STRUMA STYLE.

FAMILY GROUP—TUGBY ON THE OLD GREY MARE, RED GINGER, BEARING PADRE.

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CHAPTER VI

In the line at Doiran—Grand Couronne—My "one good deed"—The Doldzeli Sector—Horse-shoe Hill—"The Blind Ploughman"—The travelling circus—A massed attack by enemy aircraft.

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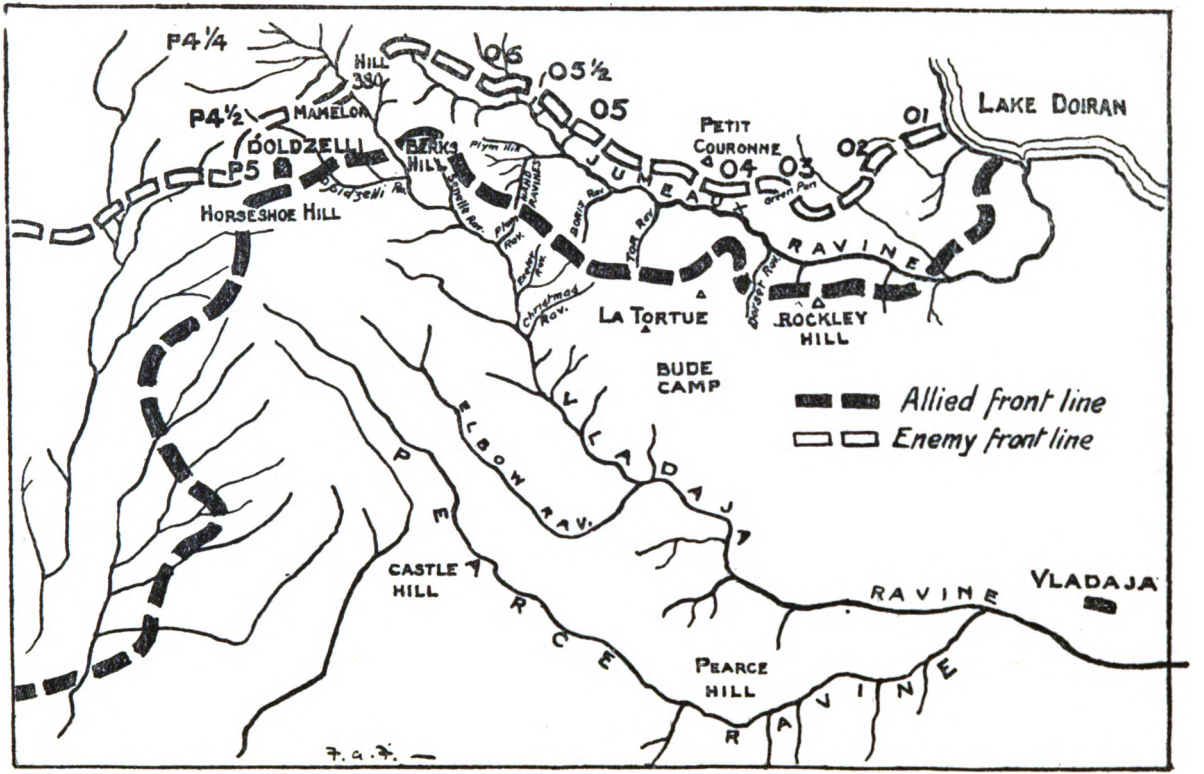

THE POSITION BEFORE **PETIT COURONNE, 1917.**

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CHAPTER VI

THE 78th Infantry Brigade, consisting of the 7th Royal Berkshires, the 9th Gloucesters, the 11th Worcesters, the 7th (Service) and the 8th (Pioneer) Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry, were occupying the Doldzeli and Horse-shoe Hill trenches, the most forward positions on our Doiran-Vardar front, when I joined them.

These trenches were known as D and E Sectors, and, with seven others designated by the letters B, C, H, I, J, L, and M, made up a more or less continuous line of defence for twenty-five miles. The line began a mile south-east of the town of Doiran, and, following along a series of foot-hills in a south-westerly direction, ended at the Vardar, near One Tree Hill on M Sector.

The hills traversed by this line varied considerably in height, but generally diminished from east to west, and averaged about nine hundred feet. Apart from a surface-covering of prickly scrub, and a few scattered trees, they were entirely barren, the soil being only two or three feet deep. Most of them were also extremely rugged, and their sides were frequently scarred by deep and tortuous ravines with very steep banks. The northern slopes, on which our trenches were dug, at many places fell abruptly to plains and nullahs, beyond which were the enemy's positions.

Our principal front-line hills from east to west, were Swindon, Silbury, Rockley, La Tortue, Castle Hill, the Basin, the Pitons, Double Hill, and One Tree Hill. In front of Castle Hill was a salient occupied by our farthest

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advanced battery under the command of Captain W. A. J. Fleming. Behind these stood a number of lesser hills, including Piton des Zouaves, Pearse Hill, the Commandant, the Table, Crow Hill, and Waggon Hill. Some distance to the west, another set of hills extended in a southerly direction, from Smol Ravine along the east bank of the Vardar, by way of Oreovica almost to Karasuli.

Immediately in rear of this hilly country were the ruined or deserted villages of Kilindir, Rates, Gugunci, Kalinova, Causica, Ardsan, north of the lake of that name, and Karasuli. Behind them again, Hirsova, Jenikoi and Vergetor formed another line of villages, while a few miles south-east of Vergetor were Hadji-Junus and Janes. All these places lay in our Doiran-Vardar area, and were occupied by us for various military purposes.

The general contour of the Bulgar front line corresponded closely with ours, except at its centre, where, after leaving White Scar Hill on the east, it struck due north and made a big loop, thereby avoiding the low ground of the Selimli River valley, and securing the advantages offered by the heights to the north and west of it. From the mountain known as Trapeze de Pobreg, the line turned back south and followed along the eastern slopes of the foot-hills overlooking the river until it reached The Nose —a prominent landmark facing our line on the right of L Sector. Thence it ran west, and terminated at Four Tree Hill on the Vardar, opposite the extreme left of M Sector, near where the town of Macukovo, which gave its name to the salient, occupied the narrow strip of no-man's-land, a thousand yards in width, between the two lines.

The enemy's chief stronghold in these parts was on our extreme right, where Grand Couronne, Petit Couronne and the Pip Ridge formed an almost impregnable barrier. This group of high mountains, already immensely strong, had been still further strengthened in the past year by the Bulgars, who, under the direction of highly skilled German military engineers, had converted the mountain

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fastnesses into a mighty modern fortification, complete with reinforced emplacements, cement dug-outs, and rows upon rows of deep trenches cut from the solid rock. This combination of natural resources and artificial defences made the enemy position around Doiran, if not actually stronger than, certainly equal in strength to the Hindenburg line in France, or the Turkish position at Gallipoli.

Opposite our Doldzeli Sector stood Grand Couronne (Kala Tepe, 1,900 feet), with its very strong O.P. (Observation Post) just below its summit. This high point overlooked the whole of our trenches from the lake to the Pip Ridge, and also commanded a complete view of the greater part of our lines of communication. The distance between this portion of our front and Grand Couronne was 6,000 yards; but as the Bulgars had outposts 3,000 yards in advance, we were only separated from the enemy line by about a mile and a half.

A mile to the west of Grand Couronne, and almost at right angles to our position, was the still higher Pip Ridge, which in shape resembled the back of a fish, and ran north and south in a succession of peaks. The peaks were designated P5½, P5, P4¾, P4¼, P3, P2, and P1. Peak 5 (2,100 feet) was the highest, while 5½ was the nearest to us. Petit Couronne, opposite C Sector, lay immediately to our right.

D Sector was by far the most unpopular of the sectors for several reasons. First, the trenches were bad. Not only were they shallow and overlooked by the enemy from almost any angle; but, being situated between the watersheds of Horse-shoe and La Tortue, they were generally wet and often waterlogged in the winter. Next, Battalion and Company Headquarters were no better. Without bomb-proof shelters, and occupying nullahs all enfilade to the enemy's guns, they failed to provide any adequate means of safety or comfort. The nullah on the left, known as "W" Ravine, four hundred yards from the enemy, bore the worst reputation of all.

The enemy artillery also appeared to be particularly

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hostile towards this sector, and never let a day pass without paying it special attention, which sometimes took the form of salvoes from their 5·9's and other guns. These attentions carried with them a heavy daily toll of life, which was rendered heavier at times by the frequent raids indulged in by the enemy or ourselves.

The E Sector trenches, on the higher ground of Horseshoe Hill, were naturally far drier, and also afforded much better protection.

In our Brigade, the working of trench duty followed the system of "eight-days-in and eight-days-out". Thus whilst the two battalions did duty for a week in the fire trenches, the other two occupied the support or reserve lines, where they were invariably employed in strenuous digging. The system no doubt had its advantages, but it also had obvious drawbacks, amongst which were the constant "packing-up", and the wearisome night marches, not along roads as in France, but across miles of rugged mountain country, rendered still more difficult in the winter by the accumulation of water and deep mud in many places. Journeys of four, five, or six miles often took as many or more hours to accomplish. The system also prevented the regiments and companies from seeing the achievement of the various undertakings allotted to them, and from making their quarters as comfortable as possible.

The 79th Field Ambulance, to which I was first attached, was encamped in a nullah half-way between our front-line trenches and Corps Headquarters at Janes. Brigade Headquarters were nearby at Gugunci, and Divisional Headquarters within two or three miles farther south.

The place being fairly central offered certain advantages, and enabled me early on to acquaint myself with the area as a whole, and with many of the Brigade and Divisional units. The chief drawback was the difficulty of reaching the front line, which was fully ten miles away and separated by hilly and rugged country. Only the first five or six miles of this stretch could be covered on

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horseback; the remainder, being under direct enemy observation, had to be accomplished on foot. My difficulties were increased by the fact that the horse supplied by the infantry was a big, heavy, broken-winded animal, wholly unfitted for the work.

Of course, I complained to the Brigade, but uselessly. The Staff Captain, Major Veasey, the most obliging and popular of Staff Officers, could only express his regret. He had put in a strong application on my behalf to Division for the best horse they could supply, and this was the result.

I next carried my complaint to the Senior Chaplain of the Division, the Reverend J. H. Doorbar, who was entirely sympathetic, and promised to bring the matter to the notice of the General. His own mount, he said, was no better than mine, and those of the rest of the Chaplains were, if possible, worse. More than once he had complained, but each time ineffectually. The answer was always to the effect that the Division was short of horses, and that combatant troops and officers had first claim to consideration. What was the remedy? He did not know; but he had often thought of suggesting to the General an inspection of all the Chaplains of the Division, mounted, and in review order.

Clearly there was little or nothing to hope for from official quarters, so my mind began to turn in another direction. There were ways and means which passed muster in the Army under the name of "wangling". Such methods might not be fully justified in theory, but on grounds of expediency they were commonly condoned, even if not altogether approved. Moreover I had often noticed that the principle in question was successfully and laudably applied to matters of food, clothing, housing, and equipment of all sorts. Why should it not be extended to horses, in case of necessity?

While I was thus pondering and speculating on the knotty moral problem which had been haunting me for several weeks, the opportunity for resolving it in practice was suddenly sprung on me. The occasion happened

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when I was spending a few days at the Transport Lines of one of the battalions of my Brigade, with the Transport Officer and Quartermaster, both good friends of mine and absolutely trustworthy.

We had just sat down to lunch when a Chaplain from another Division looked in to inquire his way. He was tired after a long journey and was glad to accept hospitality. In the course of the conversation, it transpired that he was new to the Army, and that he had travelled miles over the hills on foot, not daring to ride his horse which he said was given to galloping. Naturally I expressed sympathy, and, to show the sincerity of my feelings, I suggested a conditional exchange of horses!

The proposal "winked" at by the Transport Officer was to this effect: The timid Chaplain was to send over his dangerous animal on the next day, and, if I saw any chance of breaking him in—which for the sake of a brother Chaplain I was prepared to attempt at whatever personal risk!—the galloper would remain with me, while my own staid and thoroughly reliable charger would be sent back in his place.

Our guest gladly fell in with my offer, and the following day a groom came along with his horse. It was a sorry-looking nag with slightly bent forelegs, and long drooping ears like a mule. Sometimes one ear might stand erect while the other drooped; oftener both drooped together, but never were the two seen erect. We tried him out: his paces were fine, and what did appearances count! So back went my old "roarer" right away, and I never saw or heard anything more of him. The new horse, which I named "Loppy", took his place in the lines, and no one was a whit the wiser.

Not all admired my "Loppy", and some called him "the Padre's cab-horse". But I often put his paces to the test with other horses on the road, when results always showed in his favour, so I knew better than they did. Elated with secret successes, I began openly to speak of him as my "swift horse", which was neither an in-

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appropriate nor an untrue description, notwithstanding the jibes and jeers it sometimes evoked on the part of the ignorant and incredulous.

With the severe cold and heavy rains which began to set in towards the middle of November, a fresh burden of work was laid upon the malaria-weakened troops, who, in addition to the fighting and digging, were now compelled to improvise and construct winter quarters, to protect themselves from the approaching inclemencies of the climate.

This work was difficult enough in itself, but it was made more difficult by a deficiency in the supply of the necessary tools and materials. Fortunately there was no lack of goodwill and ingenuity on the part of the men, who threw themselves whole-heartedly into their job, and did all that was possible in the circumstances.

Most of the shelters in the front line were merely covered-in platforms, or square holes, cut into the slopes of the hills, and levelled up to the backs with sand-bags. The roofing was provided by sheets of corrugated iron laid on wood rafters or cut scantlings, which were rarely strong enough to bear the weight imposed upon them, especially when a covering of earth was added, to mitigate the heat in the summer.

Often enough the corrugated iron had to be replaced by bivouac sheets, which were at best a very poor substitute. There were no proper doors or windows to these make-shift dwellings; but entrances and apertures, hung with ground sheets or sacking, supplied the place of those refinements, and incidentally afforded abundant ventilation. Heating was effected by means of stoves, ingeniously contrived from old oil-drums, or built of mud and stones, and fed with the roots of the evergreen oak. This flourished as scrub almost everywhere, and burnt splendidly.

Camps behind the line were constructed more pretentiously, and where the houses were set in rows on opposite slopes of ravines, an appearance of street architecture—the first step of modern progress in the science of town-

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planning—was not unfrequently achieved. Double bell-tents, sunk well below the ground, and barricaded with sand-bags, were still to be seen in localities where the danger from gun-fire was regarded as remote. In these safer areas, bivouac tents were also made use of in much the same way.

On Tuesday, December 12th, I left the 79th Field Ambulance and joined the 7th Royal Berkshire Regiment in Corps Reserves at Rates—a place once a village, but now little more than a geographical expression. The only sign of the former village was a roofless church, and a long-disused fountain beside three solitary trees. The fountain was soon put into working order by the Allied Armies, and supplied the greater portion of the Doiran forces with excellent water during the summer. In return it was shelled most days by high velocity guns, and received the attention of the howitzers. The French named the locality " Les Trois Arbres " on account of the trees, which, in a virtually treeless district, were a conspicuous landmark.

Lieutenant-Colonel A. P. Dene, a Regular Officer, commanded the battalion. Keen on sport and fighting, he was a good soldier, and generally companionable. Possibly as a soldier, he had not much use for Padres in camp, and regarded their presence somewhat in the light of a kill-joy. However this may be, he appeared to resent my arrival, and showed marked coolness the first evening at mess. This was not promising!

Fortunately, however, the unpleasantness did not last; thanks to the intervention overnight of Major Gillespie, the Second-in-Command, who happened to be favourably disposed to me, cordial relations were established between us on the following morning. Happily for me, these continued for the rest of my sojourn with the Brigade.

The other Headquarters officers were Captain Dawkins, Adjutant; Captain Pryce, the M.O.; and Lieutenant Dale, an R.C., the Signalling Officer. Captains Pyke and Eldridge joined later, and I soon became very friendly

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with them. Of them, and all the officers of the battalion, I retain very happy and grateful recollections.

On December 17th, the Berkshires relieved the 7th Oxford and Bucks in the Doldzeli Sector; the latter moving back to Rates, where I joined them the same evening.

Lieutenant-Colonel A. T. Robinson, D.S.O., of the East Surrey Regiment, commanded the battalion at the time. He was a highly efficient and genial officer, and he had the further advantage of being assisted by Major Wheeler of "C" Company, who fulfilled the duties of Second-in-Command in a way that won for him the esteem and affection of all.

The Adjutant, Captain J. L. Ellis, will be remembered as a typical old soldier, whose good nature and unconscious humour in the most trying circumstances endeared him to everybody. G. F. Merritt, also of the Regular Army, made an efficient R.S.M., while Lieutenants H. T. Bonner and P. L. Molyneux respectively attended to our Ration and Transport departments with commendable skill. The other officers, whom I call to mind at the moment, were Captains C. A. Salvesen, C. B. Martin, C. P. Ker, N. J. Pierson; and Lieutenants Durno Steele, G. C. Miller, and A. T. W. Stukely, nearly all of whom obtained the M.C., or other decoration for gallantry.

With such a staff of officers, it was not surprising that an exceptionally high standard of military efficiency and morale was maintained by the battalion. Frankly, I do not remember having witnessed a greater *esprit de corps*, or a more perfect discipline in any infantry unit to which I was attached in the course of my five years with the Army.

On Saturday afternoon, December 23rd, I made my way to the Doldzeli trenches, to be in readiness to attend any wounded during a raid by the Royal Berks on Hill 180, planned to take place about ten o'clock that evening.

It was a lonely and difficult journey, and my horse

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floundered badly in a morass, causing me to dismount, and thereby occasioning the loss of one of my gum-boots, so thick and deep was the mire. Guided by the Véry lights and the rattle of machine-gun and rifle fire, I reached the battalion just as the raid was in progress, and soon learned that it was quite successful.

The trouble came half an hour later, and this is my recollection of what happened:

While I was awaiting events in a shelter in "W" Ravine, used for the Headquarters mess, but now deserted, the darkness was suddenly dispelled by a coruscation of blinding light. Accompanying the weird illumination were a succession of terrific explosions, the noise and crashes of which rolled and reverberated like thunder through the mountains. I was then conscious of the shelter being pelted with gravel and stones, and filled with dense stifling smoke. Three mines had exploded within a hundred yards of the spot, causing thirty casualties, including five deaths. I spent the rest of the night attending the wounded, and after burying Private H. Roberts, an R.C., at twelve-thirty, managed to get back between four and five o'clock in the morning to the Oxford and Bucks Camp, where I held my Sunday service at nine.

The next day was Christmas, and in the evening a most successful camp-fire concert took place, at which special rum rations were issued. It was organized by the R.S.M.; and in the interval the Colonel and myself were both called upon to make speeches, which we did to the best of our ability. As might be expected in the happy circumstances, our efforts were generously and loudly applauded.

Boxing Day saw the battalion return to the front line —this time, however, not to the Doldzeli, but the infinitely preferable Horse-shoe Hill Sector. In their absence I accepted the hospitality of the Transport Officer, and for the next few days messed at Les Trois Arbres, in the wonderful house of packing cases which Bonner, the Quartermaster, had constructed to accommodate himself

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and the canteen. Here there was no question of iron rations, our fare and cuisine being in keeping with the domestic appointments, which were excellent.

My next move was on Friday the 30th, from Rates to a camp on a hill called The Table, just off a new road which the 8th (Pioneer) Oxford and Bucks were engaged in building on the site of the old donkey track from Gugunci to Kidney Hill beyond Horse-shoe. Off this main road were endless ravines, nullahs and hillsides, crowded with R.F.A. batteries, advance dressing stations, field ambulances, and details representing every sort of unit from Corps to Brigade troops.

The camp, moreover, lay in the very centre of our "Commandant" support area, and was used for head-quarters of battalions in the Horse-Shoe Hill Sector to retire to for rest after their eight days in the trenches.

Here I arranged to be allowed to reside for some weeks, and be attached in turn to the different regiments. The 11th Worcesters, under Colonel Barker, were there at the time. Colonel Barker was an Afrikander by birth, who had distinguished himself in the Boer War, winning the D.S.O. and C.M.G. As an offset to a somewhat taciturn disposition, he possessed many sterling and manly qualities.

We had many visitors at The Table, and it was here that I first made the acquaintance of Captain Japp, a well-known artist, who commanded "B" Battery, 115th R.F.A.

Captain Japp used frequently to dine at our mess, and always proved the best of company. In course of time he expressed a wish to become a Catholic, and I had the pleasure of instructing and receiving him into the Church. An artiste of another kind, whom I received shortly afterwards, was Lieutenant Robert Coningsby Clarke of the Worcesters. He had already attained fame in the musical world through the publication of "The Blind Ploughman" some years before the war. Since then he has composed several notable songs. His sister, Isabel Clarke, is the popular Catholic novelist.

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On January 3rd, the Oxford and Bucks replaced the Worcesters in the different camps of the area—" A " Company going to a camp near Gugunci, " B " Company to Paillasse, " C " Company to the Commandant, " D " Company to Saida, and Headquarters to The Table, where I was delighted to find myself with my old companions again.

Our New Year's Day fell on the Monday, and had been ushered in at midnight by a sudden thunderous burst from every one of the guns along the British lines. As far as this may have been intended as a salutation to the Bulgar, it was clearly untimely, since his New Year, in accordance with the old style calendar, was not due till thirteen days later! When it came, it was very differently observed. Not a gun was fired, and instead of the angry sounds of war, peaceful strains of music, from familiar German bands, concertinas and mouth-organs, could be heard in the distance by our men.

On Tuesday the 13th, I was called away to the Gola district to visit the 28th Mounted Brigade, which had recently arrived from Egypt, and had no R.C. Chaplain. The newcomers were my old friends of the 4th South Midland Mounted Brigade—the Sharpshooters, the Rough Riders, and the Middlesex Imperial Yeomanry.

My return to them was due to a request from Brigadier-General Taylor, who was still in command of the unit, and desired that I should act as visiting Chaplain, and attend to the spiritual needs of the Catholics until a permanent Chaplain could be appointed. On this first visit I could give barely a week to the work, but thanks to the Staff, who arranged special opportunities for me to hear Confessions, say Mass and give Holy Communion in convenient centres on each of the six days, I was able to accomplish much in the time.

By Sunday the 18th, I had completed my rounds, and after the last service in the morning I started back on my journey to The Table, arriving the same evening. Before leaving, the Brigadier gave me to understand that his command was likely to depart for Palestine at an early

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date, and he was kind enough to suggest that I should accompany them. It was a tempting offer, but the prospect of the spring offensive, and my growing attachment to the infantry, prompted me to decline it.

Towards the end of the month, a more or less new form of excitement was provided for us by the arrival of Captain Richthofen's famous flying squadron from Germany.

My first acquaintance with this very skilful and daring pilot's " travelling circus ", as we called it, was on the afternoon of Tuesday the 27th, when I happened to be riding on the road from Kukus in company with an R.E. officer. Suddenly he drew my attention to what I took to be a dark curtain against the horizon. In reality, it was a squadron of aeroplanes in close formation, and in a few minutes they were right upon us.

Meanwhile we had taken the precaution of leaving the road, and dismounting. As we stood by our horses and looked upwards, the whole squadron of twenty-one machines, flying low and leisurely as it seemed to us, passed directly over our heads. The throbbing of the engines was distinctly audible, and the signs and numbers of the enemy craft were clearly visible. Just as I was wondering whether they would drop anything, the nose-cap of a shell from one of our " Archies ", which I brought back to the camp as a souvenir, fell plump into the ground ten or twelve yards in front of us. The squadron, as my companion informed me, was practising long distance raids, and was heading for Janes to bombard XIIth Corps Headquarters. In the actual assault, a great number of bombs were dropped; but no serious material damage was done.

According to an account given me afterwards by my friend Captain Morris who was in charge of the anti-aircraft defence, the first warning was a " Zepp " message, reporting two or three hostile planes over Doiran. Then followed a rapid succession of messages, each adding to the number of attackers, until finally over twenty were reported.

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This startling information was generally regarded as a flight of imagination on the part of some observer. However, after the long range telescopes of the anti-aircraft observers had been brought to bear on the direction indicated, there could be no further element of doubt. It was now made clear that a full double-engined Gotha squadron, of over twenty bombers, with fighting machines and scouts, was heading straight for Janes; as they approached across the plain, the roar of the engines became terrific.

To meet this massed attack, our local air-force—consisting of a few old-type open fuselage de Haviland machines, which had nothing like the climbing powers or the speed of the enemy machines—was wholly inadequate. The more modern types of machines were all required in France. As a result, our really indomitable fighters of the 47th and 150th Squadrons were badly handicapped. On this particular occasion, it was impossible for them to give the enemy battle, and all they could do was to " take off " with every aeroplane from the aerodrome, in order to save their machines. It would have taken them nearly twenty minutes to get to the height of the raiders, and in that time the enemy would have accomplished their purpose.

Consequently the whole defence devolved on the anti-aircraft service, who were also handicapped, having only two guns for the purpose. One gun, in advance of Janes, belonged to the 32nd Anti-Aircraft Section. It was an old-fashioned type, and went out of action after the first few rounds fired. The other gun, belonging to the 90th Anti-Aircraft Section under Captain Morris and Lieutenant Forsayeth, opened fire as soon as the squadron came into range, which was at about 6,500 yards. This brought the enemy into a lateral barrage of H.E. and shrapnel, when it was observed that the squadron leader at once dropped his two 50 kilo bombs, and wheeled back for home.

Simultaneously the formation broke up, and each plane, pursuing its own course, dropped its bombs as it passed Janes and Corps Headquarters.

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Meanwhile our gun of the 90th A.A.S. continued to engage the enemy for the next twenty minutes, and succeeded in that time to fire over 186 rounds of ammunition, notwithstanding an alarming delay at one moment, caused by a jammed round which fortunately was soon removed. The chief concern of our gunners was to divert from his course any bomber who appeared to be coming in a direct line, with the object of obtaining a "hit". During this period the enemy's fighting machines opened fire on our gun, but their shooting proved ineffective.

As the fighting proceeded, the hills of the vicinity—dark with dense clouds of smoke, and brilliant in turn with sheets of fire from exploding bombs—for the time being assumed the form of volcanoes in active eruption. But notwithstanding all this violence and seeming destruction, very few casualties were reported.

It was the first appearance in Macedonia of Richthofen's famous squadron, and also the first and last raid on Janes.

The next raid across our lines took place early one morning two or three days afterwards, when a flight of about five enemy planes came over. One of them was immediately hit by anti-aircraft fire, and brought down—thereupon the others withdrew! After this occasional flights of five machines at a time visited us. Later, owing chiefly to the increased efficiency of our air force, now equipped with better machines, the number was reduced to one or two at a time. At last we made things so hot for them that the appearance of a Hun over our line was an event of the rarest occurrence.

The next day I heard of serious damage having been done in the Worcester Transport Lines, and rode over to make inquiries. There I learned that three bombs had been dropped by the raiders, one of which caused casualties to the extent of fourteen men killed and wounded, and fifty-two horses and mules destroyed. As the Transport Officer related the story of the loss of his animals, tears filled his eyes.

So passed the second winter, and with it the sixth

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stage of the war, December, 1916—February, 1917. The next or seventh stage followed with the two spring months of March and May, 1917. During this time the Allies made a number of attacks in force all along the front from Lake Ochrida to Lake Doiran. These attacks were carried out with much heavy fighting, yet in no single instance did they lead to any substantial gain or loss of ground on either side.

"THREE TREE FOUNTAIN."

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CHAPTER VII

The Spring Offensive of 1917—The Jumeaux Ravine—Vladaja in ruins—The attack on Petit Couronne—What our men were doing in Salonika.

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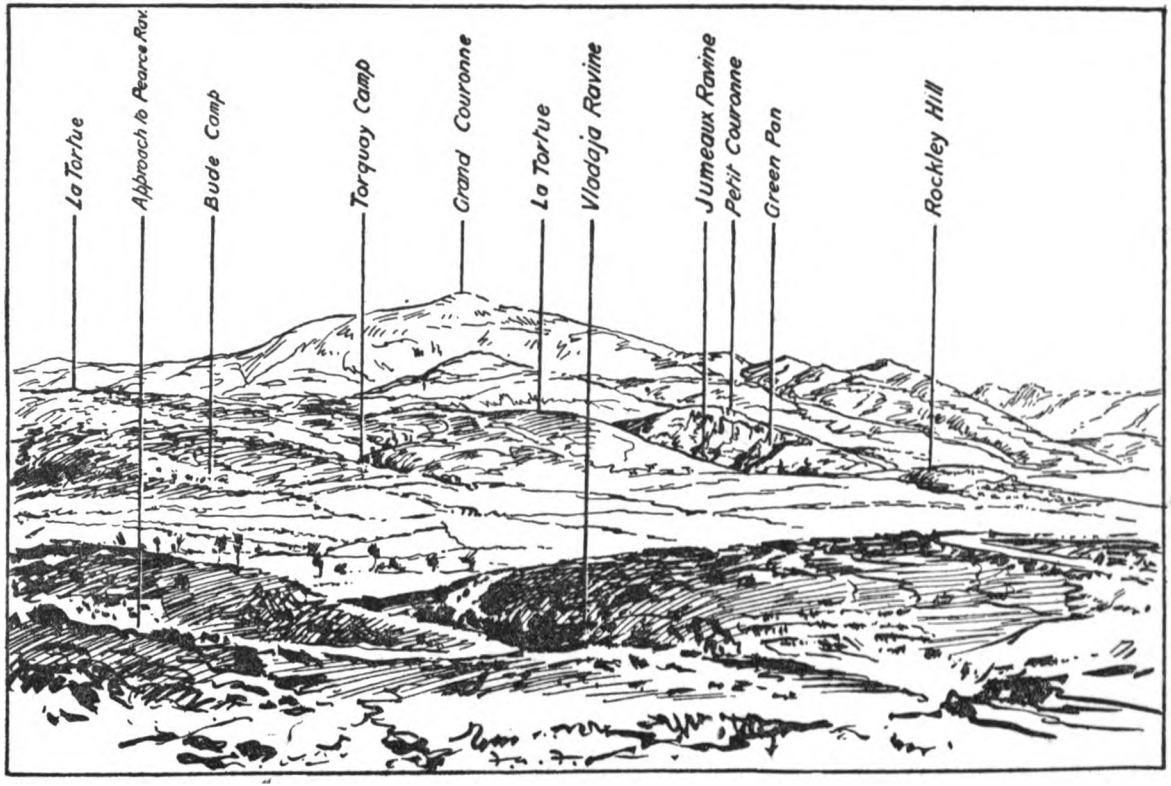

THE "PIP RIDGE."

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CHAPTER VII

WITH the sun and flowers of springtime came rumours of an early advance, together with extraordinarily accurate accounts of the attacks which our XIIth Corps would make very shortly.

Most of the reports could be traced to the Base, and came to us through the same sort of devious ways as they came to Tiadatha in Major Rutter's song, who

> " . . . Heard the story
> From his batman, who had got it
> Off the driver of a lorry,
> Who had gleaned it from a waiter
> In a Salonika Café."

Time was not slow in bringing confirmatory evidence; many signs indicated that something more than trench warfare was in the air, and that an attack in earnest on the enemy's positions around Doiran might shortly be expected.

Staff Officers, dubbed " birds of ill-omen " by " Old Bill ", now visited the front line in large numbers, and increasing reams of orders poured into Division and Brigade from Army and Corps Headquarters. Airmen became busy photographing the enemy's trenches. Guns, dumps, and the like, carefully covered with tarpaulins, and camouflaged with leaves and branches, sprang up overnight, like mushrooms, in all manner of unexpected places. Practice attacks were carried out behind the line. The troops in rest were also kept physically fit, by charging up hills at the double and digging communication trenches, which hitherto had not been found necessary.

Meanwhile Corps and Divisional troops of all sorts continually moved up; on the night of Monday the 19th, a further forward movement of the battalions brigaded in the front area, together with a general rearrangement and massing of troops in the trenches opposite Grand

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Couronne and the Pips, left no doubt in our minds as to where our attack was to be launched.

In order to meet the new dispositions of the line, the 8th King's Shropshire Light Infantry of the 22nd Division relieved our 78th Brigade in D and E Sectors, and we in turn relieved the 79th in C Sector. The same evening our Brigade Headquarters moved from Gugunci to The Table, and I left with my servant to take up fresh quarters in Pearse Ravine—a long narrow valley at the foot of Hill 420, where battalions in the line of C Sector rested during the intervals of their reliefs from trench duty.

Our camp, situated in the midst of R.F.A. Batteries, was half-way up the ravine, and my "dug-out" lay just below the brow of the hill, by the side of a track leading to the trenches on the right half of C Sector. For so advanced a position—less than a mile from the front line—the place was fairly comfortable and certainly provided more protection and better accommodation in the way of huts and "dug-outs" than the camps on either side. The only serious drawback to the position was the proximity of our own guns, which kept "strafing" the enemy, and drawing reprisals. Two field guns in particular, within a dozen yards of my "dug-out", did their best to keep me awake by firing over the ridge during the greater part of the night. The din was terrific.

The camps for the battalions on duty in the trenches of C Sector were on the right half of Elbow Ravine, Tortoise and Bude, and on the left at Christmas Ravine, Exeter and Senelle.

Practically the whole of this new sector, where we were to remain for the next few weeks, and throughout the period of the fighting, lay on the slopes of a round-backed hill named, from its shape, La Tortue. Below it was the deep Jumeaux Ravine, into which on the east the ground dropped sharply from our side, and rose yet more steeply to the Bulgar front line on Petit Couronne.

Here the trenches were only four hundred to eight

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hundred yards apart; yet there was a drop of three hundred feet between them. From this part of the line, Tor Ravine on the left, and the wider and steeper Dorset Ravine on the extreme right, led down to the Jumeaux. Towards the west, the slope from our line was generally more gradual, and the trenches were consequently farther apart.

At Senelle, however, where the ground was intersected by a number of narrow nullahs called the Hand Ravines, the slope again became fairly steep, and the intervening space was once more reduced to six or seven hundred yards.

In due course the general scheme of the offensive was published. Of this I have no official documents to consult; but according to Captain C. P. Ker's account in the Memorial Record of the 7th (Service) Battalion Oxford and Bucks L.I., the main outlines of the scheme, and the actual results of the two successive attacks in April and May, were as follows:

After a three days bombardment, a night assault was to be made by the 22nd and 26th Divisions on all the enemy positions from Lake Doiran to the Pip Ridge, three miles in extent. Three battalions of the 79th Infantry Brigade (26th Division) were to attack the eastern portion of the line from the lake to the Petit Couronne, while the 7th Royal Berks and 11th Worcesters, assisted by carrying parties from the 7th Oxford and Bucks, were to concentrate on the trenches 05½ and 06 to the west of Petit Couronne. At the same time, the 22nd Division was to carry out a concerted attack farther west on Hill 380, Mamelon and the Pips. Supplementary plans, which never matured, provided for an advance over the Grand Couronne.

Our preparatory bombardment commenced on April 21st, and continued over the 22nd and 23rd. Having the advantage in aircraft at this period, the Bulgar obtained comfortable observations and was able to reply with disconcerting accuracy to our artillery. Naturally this resulted in considerable damage to our trenches, whilst

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the artillery men were greatly harassed in their work by his well directed gun-fire and bomb-dropping.

In the course of the first day, unluckily for my own plans, I ran across Brigadier-General Duncan who commanded our Brigade. Stopping me, he issued on the spot peremptory orders regarding my position and duties in the coming battle. I was to attend the wounded at the Advance Dressing Station in Christmas Ravine, and on no account to join the firing-line. Argument was of little avail, and the only concession I could obtain was that I might ask his leave to go forward in the morning if the battle continued. I communicated the General's decision to Colonel Dene of the Berks, who sympathized with me, and promised to speak on my behalf if an opportunity occurred.

The same evening the Berks left for the trenches, " C " and " D " Companies of the Oxford and Bucks replacing them in Pearse Ravine. I joined " C " Company, and messed with Lieutenants Steele, Rodgers, Riley and Garland.

The next day, Sunday the 22nd, after saying Mass for the few troops who could attend, I began my visit to the front camps and trenches, in order to give the Catholics who wished, an opportunity of making their confessions before going into what promised to be a heavy and dangerous engagement.

It took me the best part of two days to get round, and the tour was not devoid of thrills.

On the first day I have a vivid recollection of being held up with three R.F.A. gunners on a hillside, just south of Bude Camp, by a raid of twelve enemy aeroplanes. The aircraft whirred and pirouetted for fully a quarter of an hour over the hill-top on which a wrecked and inverted gun-carriage obviously attracted their attention. Every minute or two they dropped a bomb on one or other side of this target. Meanwhile we lay flat on the ground, waiting, watching and hoping for the best.

The second day, judging from my Diary, would seem

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to have been no less exciting. The entry under date Monday, April 23rd, is as follows:

"Day fine and cool. Visited remaining camps and trenches, and heard Confessions of Royal Berks and other units. Struck six times by gravel and splinters; back of left hand grazed. Returning to Pearse, held up in Christmas Ravine communication trench twenty minutes by more aeroplanes dropping bombs. Pearse Camp badly bombed, shelled and gassed in evening."

Throughout the greater part of Tuesday the 24th, our artillery continued wire cutting, and the enemy retaliation was brisk and fierce. In the evening, after discarding all superfluous kit, and carrying the remainder as best I could with the help of my servant, I started off for the Advance Dressing Station at Christmas Ravine.

At nine o'clock, on the evening of the 24th, the main attacking troops of our 78th Brigade left their point of assembly at Senelle, and advanced by way of Hand Ravine towards the enemy trenches. Passing quickly and successfully through the danger zone of the Jumeaux, and the artillery barrage that swept the opposite slopes, they soon gained most of their first, and even some of their second objectives. These, despite vigorous local counter-attacks, they succeeded in holding through the night.

But with the launching of the main Bulgar counter-attack at two a.m., the tide of success turned rapidly and completely. Step by step, first the right of the Worcesters, and next the left of the Berks, were forced by sheer weight of numbers to retire to the Jumeaux. Finally the centre of the line was compelled to conform, and shortly after four o'clock, on account of lack of reserves (always our great handicap on this front), both battalions were ordered to retire.

The attack made by the 79th Brigade on our right met with no better success. Their centre and right battalions gained some of their objectives, but were driven back by counter-attacks. In the end, the net

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result of the Division's fighting through the night was that we had not advanced a single step.

To the west, where the enemy resistance was least, some ground had certainly been gained by the 22nd Division, who had made good by capturing Hill 380, Mamelon and P4½. From a military standpoint, however, these nominal gains were of no real advantage; though we had advanced a thousand yards on one flank, we were tactically as far as ever from our ultimate objectives, Grand Couronne and Pip 1.

Something of the nature of this engagement of the 24th and 25th April, and of the enemy tactics in massing his forces about Petit Couronne, can be gathered from the casualties incurred by the two Divisions engaged. The losses of the 26th Division amounted to 80 officers and 2,000 men; while those of the 22nd Division, I was told, were not more than a hundred in all.

The mountainous character of the country made the work of collecting and evacuating this unexpectedly large number of casualties slow and difficult. Exceptional hardships in many cases also fell to the lot of the wounded. The Bulgars, fortunately for us, acted humanely and allowed our stretcher-bearing parties, for days after the battle, to search no-man's-land for the dead, dying and wounded, who lay in all sorts of hidden and well-nigh inaccessible places. In consequence of this generous consideration on the part of the enemy, a great number of lives were saved, many wounded being rescued and brought back into our lines after long periods of exposure and starvation.

On Thursday the 26th, two days after the fighting, I rode over in the afternoon to the main dressing station of the 80th Field Ambulance—a temporary earth-work hospital built on a hillside off the road leading to Gugunci.

It had been raining in the morning, and all the preceding night, and the weather happened to be exceptionally cold for the time of the year. I expected to find all the patients cosy and comfortable in the hospital, but I was surprised to discover some two or three hundred badly

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wounded men lying in the open, exposed to the inclement conditions.

Such a sight would have been heart-rending and depressing enough in any circumstances, but for me, with my consciousness of not having fully shared the hardships and hazards of the poor fellows, the anguish and desolation was intensified a hundredfold. The incident was a sheer disaster and unmitigated tragedy, yet no one was to blame. Rational calculations had failed; the hospital "dug-outs" were overcrowded, and no other accommodation was available. That, in short, was the whole story.

The next day I visited the 11th Worcesters in reserve. They had suffered greater losses than any other unit in the Division, and the battalion was reduced to a mere skeleton formation. Most of the officers and men I knew best were missing, and the camp appeared utterly desolate.

"Never again, if I can help it," was my inward and very earnest resolve.

By the end of the month, it was known that a further offensive was contemplated, in order to bring our Division in line with the 22nd, which still held the ground previously won on April 25th.

The date and time fixed for the attack was the night of May 8th, and the plan in brief was this: The 77th (Scottish) Infantry Brigade were to commence operations by an attack on the enemy front-line positions, 01, 02 and 03, between Petit Couronne and the lake. If this attack succeeded, the Oxford and Bucks were to make an attack on 04, the higher and eastern hump of Petit Couronne. Later in the night, the Royal Berks were to pass through the Oxford and Bucks, and take 05, the westernmost and smaller hump of the hill. Colonel Howard, of the 10th Devons, was now in charge of the Brigade in place of Brigadier-General Duncan, who had just been promoted to the command of the 22nd Division.

On Tuesday, May 1st, I took the opportunity afforded by the period of preparation for the coming engagement to make a second visit to the Mounted Brigade near Gola. Before doing so, however, I called on my friend Colonel

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Dene of the Berks, and asked him to let me accompany his men at least a part of the way under fire on the 8th. As the former Brigadier-General's embargo no longer held good, the Colonel expressed his full approval, and willingly gave his consent.

On Sunday, May 6th, I returned to Pearse Ravine, to find it vacated by the infantry, who had moved off to a new bivouac camp half a mile south of Vladaja, where the Brigade had recently established headquarters.

Vladaja itself was in ruins, but the surroundings of the camp were almost idyllic. Mulberry groves, vineyards, and flowers of every hue covered the slopes, and carpeted the hillsides. The weather was perfect, and as it happened to be the season of the full moon, the song of the nightingale could be heard from nightfall to dawn.

When I reached the new camp in the evening, there was a continuous movement of troops backwards and forwards. The Oxford and Bucks were leaving for C Sector, while some companies of the Berks returned, after relieving them the same night. I met them the next morning, and as they kept me informed throughout the day of what was going on, I had no need to refer to Brigade for instructions.

In accordance with the plan already detailed, the 77th (Scottish) Infantry Brigade began their attack on the right at nine-fifty p.m. At the same time the enemy started to bombard our positions on the left with 5·9, H.E., gas and tear shells.

While this was going on, I left with my servant for Torquay Camp, where we arrived in the midst of the gas alert. I remember causing some amusement by not at once recognizing the situation, and demanding to know whether there was any gas about from men who were scarcely able to speak through their gas masks. From Torquay I pushed on to the trenches, and attended the wounded at an advance dressing station while awaiting the Berkshires who were to go forward later.

At ten-forty-five p.m. the Oxford and Bucks moved off from their trenches, and proceeded by way of Tor

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Ravine to the attack, which was timed for twelve-twenty a.m. On the journey out they were left almost entirely unmolested by the enemy, who, for the time being, was concentrating his fire on the wider, but less direct approach of the Dorset Ravine to the right.

Consequently, our men covered the distance far more quickly than had been anticipated, and were actually in position below the steepest slopes of Petit Couronne by eleven-thirty, which was about an hour too soon. This necessitated an unfortunate halt, during which the enemy opened heavy trench-mortar fire on the battalion.

Major Homan, of the 1st Royal Irish Regiment, who had recently been appointed Second-in-Command of the Oxford and Bucks, and was in charge of the assaulting troops, was the first to be hit. He was mortally wounded, and died shortly afterwards. More casualties followed rapidly, and a large number of officers and other ranks were killed or disabled long before the action commenced. Notwithstanding these heavy losses, and the fact that only six officers were left in "A", "B" and "C" Companies, the battalion, now led by Major Wheeler, succeeded in their first assault, and managed, after a short but brave resistance on the part of the enemy, to take and occupy his front-line trenches.

The attempt to take the second objective was attended with far greater difficulties, and met with little success. Captain Stukeley, with "A" Company, succeeded in overcoming the resistance on the right, and bombed a number of "dug-outs" on the north of the hill.

But on the left, "B" and "C" Companies, despite repeated and most determined efforts, made little progress. One assault after another, under the leadership of the only remaining officers, Lieutenants Durno Steele and W. Garland, both of whom were killed in the course of the action, signally failed. Garland met his death first. He possessed a bright boyish disposition, and was full of charm of character. It was with deep regret that I heard of his fate next morning.

Durno Steele was of a more mature type. I did not

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know him as well as Garland, but I knew that he was a general favourite, and admired by all ranks for his kindness and courage. The circumstances of his death were characteristic. Although wounded two or three times, and having one leg shattered, he sat on the parapet of the enemy's trench, throwing bombs, until he fell back dead into the arms of his men. Durno Steele had no V.C. or D.S.O. to his credit, and his promotion to a captaincy only arrived on the day of his death. But amongst those who knew him, he passed for an officer of extraordinary ability and devotion to duty, and also for one of the most brave and loyal of comrades. He lived and died a hero.

Through the night, the enemy made several unavailing counter-attacks; but at one-thirty a.m., after concentrating all their guns and trench-mortars on the top of the hill, they launched their main assault, and drove our men back to their first objective.

At about three-thirty a.m., Major Gillespie arrived, with two companies of the 7th Royal Berks, and decided, with Major Wheeler, that another attack should be made on 04 at dawn. A little later, Lieutenant-Colonel Dene joined them and took over command. Subsequently, at five a.m., the joint attack started, with the Berks in the front line and the remainder of the Oxford and Bucks in support.

The first assault regained the hill, which, however, was lost again within a few minutes. Major Gillespie and his leading waves never returned; while the supporting troops were driven back with trench-mortar and machine-gun fire from 02.

Meanwhile Colonel Robinson, who had been directing operations from Rockley Hill, joined the Oxford and Bucks, and the relics of the two battalions dug themselves in as best they could on the side of the hill.

There was nothing else to be done, for the Bulgar gunners had the range to a nicety. Any attempt to advance would have entailed annihilation. It was only because of the slope of the ground that many shells and

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bullets passed overhead into the ravine below. Still, far too many burst among the heroic little band of survivors, and kept adding to the terrible toll of killed and wounded. Colonel Robinson was one of those hit. He tried to carry on for a while, but eventually was obliged to leave. To the regret of all, he died of his wounds before reaching the Base. Major Wheeler and Lieutenant Stukeley, both wounded, were now the only officers left.

About ten a.m., the order came from Brigade to retire from the position. At this time there were still nearly a hundred stretcher cases to be carried into our line, and the only two routes by which they could be taken back were Dorset and Tor Ravines. Both were being heavily shelled by the enemy, who had a 77 mm. battery trained on the gap in our line at the head of Tor Ravine. This battery kept firing constantly. By three p.m. the evacuation of the hill was complete, and the last of the wounded was brought back. Thus ended the second magnificent, yet unsuccessful attempt to take Petit Couronne.

My personal impression of the battles I have described, and of the hardships and dangers to which the British Salonika Force was exposed throughout the campaign, can best be gathered from a few extracts contained in a letter written by me at the time to my friend, J. A. Droney, J.P., of Ince and Appley Bridge. Questions had been asked in the Press as to what the British Salonika Force was doing to justify its existence, and the idea was growing that the whole campaign was a sort of picnic. My letter, which first appeared in the English Northern Press, and was subsequently reprinted and circulated in the Salonika Force by authority of the Army, was to answer these utterly wrong suggestions.

"The British soldier of the Salonika Army faces the odds of privation and danger at least as much as his comrades in any of the other theatres of war. Persons who write and speak glibly to the contrary, and who are anxiously asking what the British Army in Macedonia is doing to justify its existence, are strangely ignorant of their subject. They can have no notion of the nature

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of the country and climate, or of what our men are up against. I could astonish you were I allowed to reveal the average losses each day of a single battalion in the trenches; as for our Salonika Army being expected to do more than it has done to justify its existence, this is preposterous. Any additional attempts to achieve the impossible might well lead to its having no existence whatever. In the past I saw some fighting in Gallipoli, yet I never witnessed anything so fierce or so terrible as some of our recent scrapping in Macedonia.

" Never shall I forget the terrible sounds and sights that reached me behind the line of our trenches throughout the night of the first battle. The thunder of the artillery echoing amidst the mountains, the crashes of the shells and bombs exploding in the neighbouring ravines and hollows, the fierce ripping of the air by smaller projectiles, the flashes of the guns, the glare of the search-lights, the glittering colour effects of the signal rockets—all these weird and varied phenomena combined to create an indescribable impression of wildest confusion and uttermost horror.

" Daybreak revealed a striking transformation, and as I looked from the elevated position of our trenches on the scene of the night's battle, I saw no trace of the tragedy. Instead, a wonderful panorama of beauty lay before me. Soft white clouds of mist and smoke, shining in the morning light, filled the valleys and covered the low-lands; while above their gossamer veil mountains and hill-tops stood out in sharpest relief, like green islands in a sea of white, giving an illusion of perfect peace. All was still, and the stillness following that nightmare of noise made the peace seem even more real and delightful. As I watched and listened, the only sounds to break the silence were the first notes of the birds, preparing to greet the opening day. Meanwhile, the sun came out in all its glory, shedding fresh lustre on the entire scene. It was as though, for the time being, nature had defeated the barbarism of man, and declared a truce of God.

" At dawn in the second fight, I went over the parapet with the Royal Berkshire Regiment in which my grandfather—Captain John Day—had fought during the Napoleonic wars. Several reasons prompted me to go forward with the battalion. There was the express

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desire of the O.C. A stronger motive, however, lay in my knowledge that the path of our advance was also the sole way whereby all the wounded would start to return. The worst cases could only be attended on the spot. From past experience I also felt that the voluntary presence of a non-combatant in the danger zone was a useful example, and likely to encourage the men.

"On our journey through the trenches, we soon became aware of the results of the enemy counter-bombardment, and in particular of the effects of their trench-mortars. Large gaps appeared in the parapets, and huge shell-holes rendered the trenches in many places impassable. Here and there dead men lay partly buried. Two upturned faces cheek by jowl, one of a man in his maturity, the other a mere boy, presented a ghastly sight which I shall never forget. We also passed many who appeared to be mortally wounded, and near their end. Some of them implored help; others only asked to be lifted out of the way. To be compelled to step over the dead and dying, and to refuse such pleadings, was indeed a trying experience. A minute or two would have sufficed to comply with their requests, but that minute or two might have proved sufficient delay to create a dangerous loss of contact amongst the advancing troops. One consolation remained—it was the knowledge that the R.A.M.C. would follow shortly, and render loyal and devoted service to these poor fellows.

"On leaving the trenches, our way lay through a steep and narrow gulley called Tor Ravine. This led to the wider Jumeaux Ravine at the foot of Petit Couronne. Here the path was literally strewn with dead and debris; and, as we crept down it, we passed more wounded struggling back to the line. Some of these unfortunate men were practically helpless, and I promised to return shortly to their assistance. Meanwhile H.E. shells and shrapnel were bursting around us, scattering stones and splinters in every direction.

"The next obstacle was the Jumeaux, the crossing of which, on account of the width and roughness of the ground to be traversed, and its exposed position—it was enfilade to the enemy's guns on east and west and an easy target for their trench-mortars in rear of Petit Couronne—was a most difficult and dangerous undertaking. This

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ravine had always had an evil reputation, and was generally regarded as a death-trap. On the present occasion, believe me, it more than justified its reputation. The worst crossing by far was in the early hours of the night, when the enemy bombardment was at its height. Of that I cannot speak as an eye-witness, but from reports I gathered afterwards it was an appalling experience. Whole platoons were blown to pieces, and numbers of men were killed outright by the mere concussion of the explosions! What I witnessed in the morning, however, was bad enough in all conscience. The shooting had re-commenced, and the valley once more took on much of the appearance of an inferno. Yet in face of this fearful menace, there was no wavering; our men went gallantly forward into the awful maelstrom, and passed through its terrors undaunted.

"When I arrived on the other side, an engineer was reported to me to be lying wounded and in danger some twenty yards up the ravine. I started out to make a search, shouting meanwhile. At length, I heard a faint call, and coming up, I found him lying beside some bushes; after placing him in a more sheltered position, I rejoined the main body, and accompanied them up a portion of the hill. Then, standing aside, I bade them farewell as they clambered up the last two hundred yards of the ascent, and with a shout rushed the trenches. 'Come on, Johnnie!' cried the Bulgars—and our Tommies went on, make no mistake. So also did the Bulgars, fleeing for their lives as fast as they could. To cut the story short, our boys did all they could—all that was asked of them. They stormed the trenches, took the hill, and laid down their lives for England. It was superb and heroic! An impregnable position was taken, and for the time being held! From now onwards, there was a steady flow of wounded, returning from the attack, and for the next four or five hours, I was kept busy attending to them. Much of my work consisted in helping the disabled, on their way back across the Jumeaux, and up Tor Ravine, to our trenches. Here medical orderlies and stretcher-bearers were in readiness to give them attention. About ten o'clock, I thought I would like to see what was happening at the scene of action, so I pushed on to Petit Couronne. There I witnessed an indescribably gruesome sight. Lying and sitting, in all kinds of positions, were

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rows upon rows of dead and dying. Many of the wounded were horribly mangled. Some were obviously insensible to pain, while others were suffering agonies. Amongst the wounded officers—and few escaped—was the Colonel of my battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel A. P. Dene. His right arm was shattered and he had a second minor wound. He was still carrying on. 'Stick it, Berkshires, and show them what you're made of!' I asked him to leave, but he would not. Later he was obliged to do so. They gave him the D.S.O. and he deserved it! Many other officers and men received decorations; countless others deserved them, for every man that day was a hero. Of the artillery barrage through which our men passed, and to which they were exposed for hours, I heard it said by officers and men who had been in some of the big pushes in France, that it was more terrible than anything they had previously faced.

"I did not intend to linger on the hill, but was held up the best part of an hour. During this time, I made a round of the troops, and assisted the neediest as best I could. I also consulted the officers on the situation, and found them agreed that it was hopeless. Armed with this knowledge, and determined to use it, though I had no official sanction to do so, I started off for our line, and, stopping at the first signal station, 'phoned my impression to Brigade. On my way back again, shortly afterwards, I was not surprised to see the hill being evacuated, and the troops retiring independently. Amongst those returning, I met Lieutenant-Colonel Robinson, the O.C. of one of the battalions with whom I had previously lived on the most friendly terms. He was badly wounded by shrapnel in the neck, but was endeavouring to walk by himself, having refused to be carried by his men. However, he was willing to be assisted by me, and allowed me to help him up the ravine, as far as the Advance Dressing Station.

"The enemy barrage was now very heavy, and was being directed purposely to cut off the return of our troops to their trenches. This rendered the last hundred yards or so of the approach to the gap above Tor through which we had to pass, absolutely perilous, and particularly for my charge and myself, as we could at best only move slowly. However, by calculating the intervals between the shell-bursts, and making the most haste we could, we

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succeeded at the finish in getting through safely. The remainder of the journey was easier, and when I left the Colonel at the Advance Dressing Station, I felt sure he would recover. Unfortunately, within twenty-four hours, he died of his wounds. It is probable that his courageous resolve not to be carried, but to help himself to the utmost, cost him his life. Another good friend I lost that day was that very popular and gallant officer, Major W. B. Gillespie.

"I will mention a last incident. I had helped a poor fellow whose foot was crushed, back to the trenches, and handed him over to the stretcher-bearers. They carried him by a short cut over the top. Within a few seconds came the crash of a shell, and a minute after I met my old friend crawling along the trench. He informed me that the shell had killed three of the bearers and wounded the fourth, and that he himself had received a fresh wound in the back. There was nothing for it, so I took him on my back. He was groaning terribly, and exclaiming all the time, 'Cruel! Cruel!' When I set him down for a rest, he was unconscious. The R.A.M.C. then took him in charge, but I fear he did not get far.

"Such is a general sketch of a twenty-four hours experience of battle in the Balkans. Your imagination must fill in the details. I only remember it as a sort of nightmare; yet the actual experience was vivid and thrilling in the extreme. The only feature I have omitted was the initial gas attack—a loathsome method of warfare I prefer to pass over. I trust I have said enough to show you that the beer-and-skittles theory of our life in Macedonia is a poor sort of joke, and very far from depicting realities. No; they must not call us slackers. You can suggest any other name—Macedonian Marauders, Balkan Buccaneers—anything else will do, but not Salonika Slackers, if you please."

In the autumn, a third attempt to storm the enemy positions on the Pip Ridge was made by the XIIth Corps, with at least as heavy costs, and with even less success. At length these dominant heights became recognized as practically impregnable, and the policy of a warfare of "waiting and wearing down" was wisely adopted.

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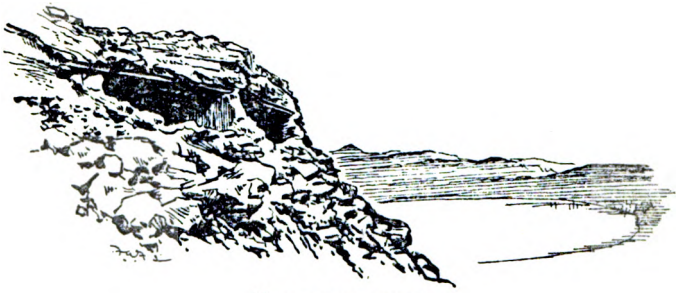
As a result of this policy, heroically maintained in spite of untold sickness, suffering and weariness, the combined Balkan Armies, in the autumn of 1918, finally achieved the impossible. Storming this mighty barrier, they made the first breach in the wall of steel that reached across Europe, from the coast of Belgium in the west to the shores of the Ægean in the east.



"THE EVIL EYE."

CHIEF BULGAR O.P., GRAND COURONNE.

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CHAPTER VIII

The Snevce Sector—The wonderful Italian camps—General Sir George Milne—Those mules again—Father Charles Heurtley—The Happy Valley—Tetre Vert—The Kalinova Balloon Section—Race day for the Berks—My return home.

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LOPPY WINS.

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CHAPTER VIII

On the morning of May 20th, those of us who were left of the 78th Infantry Brigade struck our camps in the ill-omened Doiran district, and started east on a two-day march across the Kilindir plain, to take over the Snevce or Dova Tepe Sector of the Krusha Balkan front, formerly occupied by the Italians.

The sector allotted to us extended for ten or twelve miles along the northern slopes of the mountains, and included a number of villages amongst the wooded hills overlooking the Salonika-Constantinople railway, between Snevce and Dova Tepe. Snevce was the farthest south of these villages, and Dova Tepe the last of the mountain peaks to the north. From that point, the front continued east along the railway line.

We arrived at our destination in the afternoon of the 22nd, and without waiting for darkness, immediately took over from the 79th Brigade. It was the first daylight relief I remember in the war, and was only practicable because of the nature of the ground, and the distance from the enemy.

The new camps left by the Italians were found to contain every comfort and convenience, and were so suitable, in all matters of arrangement, that they might have been specially designed and prepared to meet our particular requirements. High up in the hills, beautiful villa-like huts provided delightful quarters for Brigade; while a little lower down, on the slopes, similar huts accommodated Battalion Headquarters. Beneath these, the Company Camps were no less conveniently and even more picturesquely established, in cosy nooks and gullies, immediately above the trenches. Leading down from the summits, and connecting the various sections, wound pretty woodland paths, overhung with rich foliage, and

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decked with the fragrant flowers of a Balkan spring, whose glories were not yet departed.

In addition to these beautiful surroundings, the new sector took in at many points exceptionally wide and interesting fields of vision. Far away in the distance, bounding the horizon on the north-west, rose the giant crests of Grand Couronne and the Pip Ridge; while beneath, and overshadowed by them, lay the oval lake and picturesque town of Doiran. Nearby, the Doiran-Strumnitza road threaded its way through the hills. On parts of this highway—the enemy's main communication in this area—with the aid of field-glasses, we occasionally caught glimpses of his transport.

Due north between us and the Bulgar front spread the four-mile expanse of the Butkovo Valley. With its gleaming river and scattered villages, this fertile plain formed a fair and pleasant prospect. Beyond it, and in striking contrast towered the black mass of the Beles Range—Bulgaria's mighty rampart in the south.

This portion of the enemy front line was enormously strong; but, since its strength depended almost entirely upon natural features, and very little on numbers and artillery, which were reduced to a minimum, we had no reason for apprehensiveness in regard to the security of our own positions. Even though the enemy outposts were pushed well forward on the plain, these remained remote from his principal force, and were practically immune to gun-fire.

Altogether, Snevce was an immense relief, and, after Doldzeli and La Tortue, the change was like awaking from a nightmare of barbarism to the grateful realization of civilization and comfort. Both our experience and our sentiments coincided with those of Tiadatha and the Dudshires, who

> "Trekked across the hills to Snevce,
> To the Doya Tepe Sector.
> Settled in Popovo village
> In the ruins of Sirlovo,
> Giving thanks to the Italians
> For the huts they'd left behind them—

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Huts with well-planked walls and ceilings,
Roofed with red tiles from the village,
Fitted out with chairs and tables,
Beds and doors, and real glass windows!
Very restful, very soothing,
After the eternal sand-bags
And the corrugated iron
Of the dug-outs they'd been used to—
Just like moving to the Carlton
Out of rather third-rate lodgings."

We owed a further debt to the Italian engineering genius for a fine system of mountain roads, which added greatly to the convenience and charm of the locality. These splendid highways, perfectly graded and up-to-date in every detail, connected all parts of the front, and, zig-zagging for miles along the wooded slopes of the hills, revealed at every bend and turn of their course fresh panoramas of beauty. I recall what a pleasure it was to be out and about in those days, and how much this pleasure was increased by meeting old friends, or making new acquaintances.

On one occasion, early in June, while on my way to Sirlovo, I had the good fortune to meet our Commander-in-Chief, Lieutenant-General Sir George Milne. He was riding at the time with Brigadier-General Howard, and after they had passed me, the Brigadier returned to say that the General wished to speak to me. I rode back and was duly introduced.

This was the first time I had come in contact with the Chief, although I had frequently seen him before during his visits to the front line. He was a man of middle age, with hair turning grey, of medium height, and compactly built. A pair of keen blue eyes, a round head and square face, strong jaw, short trimmed moustache, and an erect bearing, all indicated the strong man, the alert and mature soldier. It was also noticeable that he wore a monocle, as few can, effectively, and that he had a peculiar habit of screwing up his eyes and focussing a stranger into his shrewd perspective. This mannerism, so frequent amongst men of quick judgment and action, has—for all

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its excellent attributes—little comfort for the individual under inspection.

There were, I am informed, occasions when his subordinates, confronted by that hard scrutiny, hungered for a solitary place; but there were, in compensation, other occasions when the Higher Command would have preferred that their Chief reserved his tireless sense of perfection for their subordinates. But that was not his way. His standard of values left no loopholes for compromise, and his sense of duty became inflexible with the strength of his own convictions. In this and other respects of his character, our Commander-in-Chief fulfilled, in an outstanding manner, the beau ideal of the man and the soldier. Incidentally he gained for himself extraordinary popularity. This, like the honours that came to him later, was deserved but never sought.

There are certain qualities—both of mentality and physique—which seem to be common to men of the highest military type. These qualities were fully exemplified in the British Commanding Officers of the Armies of 1914. No finer leaders of men by birth, training, courage and personal idealism were ever gathered together in any war in history.

General Milne was typical of this class. Born of Scottish stock, like so many great soldiers, he saw active service in the Sudan and South Africa. At the outbreak of the European War, he was in command of the 4th Divisional Artillery, and later he commanded the 27th Division and the XVIth Army Corps in France.

These military antecedents and generic qualities, if I may so describe them, of the soldier in General Milne, were no doubt a high recommendation in his favour. But what helped most towards his universal popularity was the impression he made on us of absolute downrightness and complete sincerity of purpose. No one could come in contact with him without being impressed by these characteristics. At once they set him in a category apart, and constituted him the idol of his Army.

If he was a stickler for discipline, or "down on

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slackers ", or even sometimes extremely irascible, it was attributed, not to any lack of humanity, but to his zeal and sense of duty, his care for the Army entrusted to him, and the pride which he took in it. Such was the common verdict, and it was right. The Commander-in-Chief was the soul of courage and honour. No officer displayed more consideration for his troops; none showed a finer example.

As comrade and commander—and he was both to every one of his soldiers—he is still and will long be remembered under the name of " Uncle George ". This was the title we gave him out of sheer esteem and affection; and of all his titles—though he is now a Field-Marshal—it is the one, as I have reason to know, that he loves best from those who served under him.

As an example of the good-natured stories which increased the popularity of " Uncle George ", I venture to quote the following, without vouching for its truth. It concerns an unlucky encounter, on the road near Salonika, between the Commander-in-Chief, and a plucky young subaltern, in command of a mule convoy—then in a state of hopeless confusion.

Whether this was due to the young officer's inexperience, or to the notorious inefficiency of the native drivers employed as auxiliaries, might be open to question. But the important matter was that the immediate responsibility for the disorder—an unpardonable offence in our Army—rested on the young officer. Moreover, as the General and his staff approached, the confusion was at its height. Mules and muleteers were anywhere and everywhere! The state of affairs was chaotic, and it was now too late to restore order. At any moment the storm might break.

Nothing daunted, this fearless young officer rode boldly forward to meet the danger, and, face to face with his irate Commander-in-Chief, promptly assumed the initiative:

Y.O. (*saluting with military precision*): " Sir, may I be allowed to make a complaint? "

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C.-IN-C. (*suppressing his wrath*): "You may, sir!"

Y.O.: "You will have observed, sir, the disgraceful condition of this convoy. That riff-raff," pointing to the natives, "is the sort of help that G.H.Q. sends us to work our pack-transport. I submit that it is a scandal, and I am grateful to you, sir, for allowing me to bring the matter to your notice."

The Commander-in-Chief, momentarily bewildered, passed on. A week later, while walking with his A.D.C. in Salonika, he observed a young subaltern on the opposite side of the street, and drew his companion's attention to him, saying:

"That's the young fellow who beat me!"

My personal relations with General Milne in the war, were necessarily remote; but, such as they were, they left me with a sense of sincere esteem and regard for him, which subsequent contacts have greatly served to increase. I recall, in connection with myself, the very real pleasure I experienced on reading in the papers, four years ago, of his selection for the position of Chief of the British Imperial Staff. I was in the U.S.A. at the time, and I had fresh in my mind a story told me by Colonel Burtt, of the American War College in Washington, concerning a remarkable compliment paid by the German Deputy Chief of Staff to the old British Army in 1914. Desirous at once to express my own satisfaction to the General at the news of his promotion, and also to let him know what I had heard of the Army which was now committed to his care, I wrote him a letter of congratulation, including this pleasing tribute.

The facts and circumstances of the story are these:

The narrator, Colonel Burtt—whom I met at Winooski, Vermont, when he was staying at Fort Ethan Allen, while I was on a visit in the neighbourhood—had acted during the earlier portion of the war as observer for the American Army. In that capacity he was privileged to reside at the German Headquarters.

After the battle of Mons, he heard Colonel Von Freitag Loringhoven, the Deputy Chief of Staff, openly declare

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the British Army to be the bravest in history. On asking the German officer how he supported his statement, the reply given was simply that the courage of an army was tested in retreat, and that the British Army had proved its supreme courage by putting up a magnificent and heroic fight, after accomplishing one of the hardest retreats in the records of military history. Such testimony from the enemy of the "old contemptibles" in the first year of the war speaks for itself.

Colonel Burtt afterwards fought with the Allies, and made a number of friends amongst English officers.

"I owe a personal debt of gratitude," he said, "to your Army for extraordinary courtesy and kindness to myself. That is why I always tell this story to English officers, and will you please repeat it to your military acquaintances."

In due course, General Milne replied, expressing his warm appreciation of the friendliness of the American Colonel, and of the fine generosity of the German Staff Officer. He also added that, in the coming four years, he hoped to make the new British Army under his command fully equal to its glorious predecessor. I have no doubt but that he has accomplished his ambition.

Months after this, and towards the close of my stay in America, I spent a few busy days in Washington, and just before leaving the beautiful City, I 'phoned to Colonel Burtt to tell him of the use I had made of his story and the sentiment it had evoked. He was evidently delighted, and begged me to come along and stay at his home. Unfortunately it was too late; a taxi was at the door, and I was starting on my way home to England.

To get back to the Snevce front from this considerable digression, I ought to say that I was still with the Royal Berks, and that the battalion was temporarily under the charge of a new and particularly pleasant C.O., Lieutenant-Colonel F. A. Baker Morrell, of the K.O.R. Lancaster Regiment. Colonel Morrell came to us from the 28th Division, to replace Colonel Dene, a few days after the last of the fighting in May, and remained with

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the battalion till close to the end of the year. He was a convert son of the late Rev. Baker Morrell, of the Church of England, and entered the Army early. Though still quite a young man, he had acquired a considerable experience of soldiering, having seen service in India and elsewhere, as well as at home. Equally amiable and capable, he won golden opinions amongst us, and we were all sorry to lose him when the time came for his return to his old Division. Six years after the declaration of peace, I had the pleasure of conducting the service on the occasion of his marriage in London to Miss Adam, who had also served with the Army in Macedonia.

The 7th Oxford and Bucks also had a new Commander with them at Snevce, the late Colonel Robinson's place having been taken by Lieutenant-Colonel P. Villiers-Stuart. The new Colonel came to the Brigade from the 3rd Royal Fusiliers to which he belonged, and remained till the end of the war. Besides being in all respects a particularly delightful personality, he was an extremely able commander.

The time was all too short on this new and pleasant front, and when news came, at the beginning of June, that our Brigade was to be relieved by another, it caused something like consternation.

The first unit to be withdrawn was the 7th Oxford and Bucks, who moved on the 7th of the month, their place being taken by the 1st K.O.Y.L.I. of the 83rd Infantry Brigade, 28th Division, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Mallinson, to whom was attached Father Charles Heurtley, of the Birmingham Oratory, the Brigade R.C. Chaplain.

I dined with them at the K.O.Y.L.I. Headquarters on Sunday the 10th, before leaving for the Vardar the next day with the Berks. It was the first time I had met the Father, though I had previously heard a great deal about him. Tall and imposing; active, amiable and zealous; his physical and spiritual qualities endeared him to all. For those who know " Father Charles ", it will be enough to say that he was as esteemed and popular amongst the

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troops at that time as he is to-day with his parishioners of the fashionable Edgbaston district. His brother, Major-General W. A. Heurtley, held an important position at the Base.

Our battalion moved off early in the evening of the following day from its pleasant quarters, and bivouacked the first night at Moravca. Marching again by night on the 12th, we reached Hirsova between one and two o'clock in the morning of the 13th. There we encamped in a vineyard by the side of the river, and rested that day and part of the following.

The river, rather than the vineyard, which was covered with prickly vines recently pruned, proved the attraction, and I remember the delight of bathing in its clear, cool running stream the next morning.

Shortly after breakfast, I got away again with Captain Pyke's advance party, and arrived the same afternoon at the " Crag "—a camp beyond Kirec where Brigade Headquarters were first established. Later in the summer, as our battalions moved farther to the west of the line, Brigade changed first to Gugunci, and then on to the neighbourhood of Smol, where they occupied a furrow of the hill, which, on account of its security against shell-fire, was regarded as a " cosy sort of a place to live in ", and appropriately christened " Happy Valley ".

After the formality of handing the Crag over, Lieutenant-Colonel Harvey of the Black Watch, and his officers, welcomed us to lunch and tea, making much of us, as well they might in the circumstances. The rest of the battalion did not arrive until the early hours of the next morning.

This was the beginning of a long spell for our Brigade on the Vardar, which lasted over a year, and well beyond my time in Macedonia. During the whole of this period, except for a few weeks spent in Army Reserve at Langaza, the troops, though not always in the front line, were seldom more than a couple of miles away from it.

The sectors allotted to us extended to the extreme left of the British line, and though the ground was practically

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all new to us, yet, being mostly low barren hills, it offered little interest.

Smol Hill, however, was an exception. From its summit, nine hundred feet above sea-level, a splendid view of the Vardar valley, and the country around for miles, presented itself. Looking south, we could see the broad expanse of the Vardar plain stretching right down to the marshes of Salonika, with the sea shining as a mirror beyond, and the far-famed Mount Olympus casting its shadows in the background.

To the north, the river could be traced for fifteen miles, until it disappeared round a bend of the gorge into Serbia. On the west rose the distant crests of the Florina range, with the mountains of Serbia still snow-capped in the early summer; whilst on the east stood out the familiar rugged mass of the Krusha Balkans. Immediately below were our own lines; and in continuation, across the River Vardar, in a direct line with Smol Hill, were the French second positions about Kara Sinanci and Mayadag. Farther up the western bank of the river, and well behind the Bulgar front line, the town of Guevgelli was visible, with its famous bridge across which the advance guard of the 10th Division had marched, with high hopes to rescue Serbia, nearly two years previously.

On the top of the hill there was a big solitary building, where Major Tomlinson, with Captain Fraser and a section of the 79th Field Ambulance, attended our sick and wounded. The XIIth Corps O.P. was also somewhere on the hill watching the enemy's movements through a wonderful telescope, and recording the exact number of trains that arrived at or left the rail-head, some six miles north of Guevgelli.

Other camps I remember in reserve to the front line were at Daché, Crow Hill, Sedimli, Bald Hill and Tetre Vert. Tetre Vert is impressed on my memory as my last camp in Macedonia.

There were also artillery units in the neighbourhood, and it was here that I made friends with Major Kearns, D 116, and Captain Haggart, A 114.

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Glen Smol, about a mile north of Smol Hill, and Gulley Ridge, overlooking the plain that contained Lake Ardzan farther south, were two principal camping grounds. In the glen, which was for Brigade Reserve, I spent some weeks of the late summer and early autumn, in close proximity to the 78th Machine-Gun Company, who occupied the side of a hill just above our infantry camp on the left-hand side of the road leading towards Smol. They were excellent company, and I rarely passed their camp, here or elsewhere, without paying them a visit, and calling on Major W. Q. Henriquez, D.S.O., and his officers, Lieutenants H. M. Mathison, R. P. Adam, J. C. McGrath, P. J. Trevor, H. Fairhurst, A. H. F. Lukyer, W. N. Wakeley, J. I. McEllham, J. Sharp, G. W. Higgs, and J. E. James.

One was always sure of the heartiest welcome from these officers.

Gulley Ridge was occupied by Divisional R.F.A., A.S.C., Pack Transport, a Small Arms Ammunition Column, the 80th Field Ambulance, while on the plain below, alongside the high road from Kalinova to Gugunci, there were a series of dumps and wagon-lines. My favourite rendezvous in this part was the A.S.C. Camp, where I always received the most generous hospitality from Captain Bergman and his assistant, Lieutenant Whybrow.

Naturally there were critics of the A.S.C. in Macedonia, as elsewhere, who, no doubt prompted by jealousy, pretended to regard this invaluable branch of the forces as merely pampered parasites, and applied to them such doggerel as the following:

"With the Middlesex in the firing-line,
And the Queen's in support behind them;
But when we look for the A.S.C.,
I'm hanged if we can find them."

Of course this was sheer nonsense, and no one ever really believed it. If the A.S.C. lived well, which they might do, having the means at their disposal, who should blame them? They also worked well, entertained well, and served the fighting forces magnificently.

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Back at Kalinova, where I spent a short time in the middle of July with the Berks Transport, and caught my first attack of malaria through bathing in Lake Ardzan in the evenings while the mosquitoes were out, there were more wagon-lines, artillery camps and a balloon section. Having witnessed people falling through space from burning balloons, and having seen at close quarters a very stout Major arrive, upside down, in a parachute, I had no aspiration to make ascents like some venturesome outsiders, including the Major aforesaid.

Happier recollections of Kalinova than the malaria, and the burning balloons, are associated in my mind with pleasant evenings spent at the 115th R.F.A. mess, in company with Colonel Mackenzie and his officers.

At Gugunci, Major-General Sir Arthur Gay, who commanded our 26th Division and remained with it till the end of the war, had his headquarters. He was interested in amateur theatricals, and started a movement to introduce them to the Division with extraordinary success. Before long a big farm-building, behind the line near Kalinova, had been converted into a grand theatre, where a pantomime was produced which delighted the troops, and recalled the old days of Drury Lane at its best. For months I never came in contact with the General until one day we met on the road, and he reminded me that we had played together as children at Hampstead!

This chance meeting led to more than ordinarily pleasant relations, and occasional invitations to lunch or dinner with himself and his staff. Another privilege which followed later was a visit, from Wednesday to Saturday in the last week of September, to Corps Headquarters at Janes.

This unexpected invitation came to me in the form of a telegraph message from the Corps Commander, Lieutenant-General Sir H. F. M. Wilson. As his G.S.O.3 Brigadier-General, F. Fuller, had been educated at my old school, Beaumont, probably the idea of the Commander was to bring us together. Anyway I greatly enjoyed the

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experience, and learned quite a good deal concerning our second line of defence, in the course of a long ride of inspection on the Saturday morning, in company with my friend the G.S.O.3.

The eighth stage of the war (June-November, 1917) on which we were now entered, was chiefly a campaign against our worst enemy, malaria. Preventive and curative treatments were experimented with in the hospitals; while a number of sanitary precautions, including the spreading of oil on water surfaces, to discourage the mosquitoes, were adopted.

Of the many safeguards attempted, the most satisfactory proved to be the removal of troops, wherever possible, from the lower fever-stricken zones to higher and healthier ground. This was carried out with the best results on the Struma front, where at the beginning of the summer most of our forces were withdrawn to the hills, only a small number being kept on the plain to man a few fortified bridge-heads. The Bulgars followed a similar plan, leaving a message in our lines: "You are going to the hills: so are we."

The tenth stage of the war covered the period from December, 1917, to August, 1918. Though raids and minor engagements continued to take place as usual during this time, no fighting on a large scale occurred. The struggle in the Balkans resolved itself more than ever into a war of "waiting and wearing down." This lasted until September, 1918, when the final stage commenced, which quickly developed into a rapid "advance and break through", which brought the war to an end.

If I omit to describe the many military events of my last months with the Army in Macedonia, it is simply because of a desire on my part to avoid repetition. One sporting event, to show the lighter side of our life, needs to be chronicled:

Sunday, December 23rd, was Race Day for the 7th Royal Berks, who were now in Army Reserve near Lake Langaza. I was newly back with the battalion after a spell in hospital, but I soon got to know all about this

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coming event which for weeks had been the main topic of conversation. The ten furlongs flat race for officers' horses, ridden by their owners, was the chief betting attraction, and many were preparing to make "big fortunes" by backing their particular fancies.

Black and White was the favourite amongst our lot. But the artillery had another splendid animal, a fine chestnut, which stood high with outsiders. The Chestnut also appealed to some of the Berks, because it came from Reading, and was rumoured to have won races at Newbury.

At first I had no serious thought of putting my horse, Loppy, in for the race; but when I heard the mere suggestion of my doing so ridiculed, I at once changed my mind and had him entered. Having done this, just to show my earnestness of purpose, I took on a few small bets with friends among the officers. They might make mirth at the expense of myself and my "swift horse" if they liked; but I also might put a joke on them, in which event both sides would have had a share in the fun.

Church parade was arranged for an early hour that morning, and as soon as it was concluded, the crowd went off to the races. Visitors kept streaming in, while grooms with horses from other units continued to arrive till the last moment. All was excitement and merriment. Comedians up and down the course amused the crowd, while tipsters harangued select groups. Busiest of all were the book-makers, who, with Captain Barrett and his crowd of the Berks, were making a hotter favourite than ever of Black and White, by shouting the odds at the top of their voices in a way which annoyed me, and should have made them hoarse for their pains—not that I wished ill to anyone.

Tugby, my batman, led me and my horse to the starting-point, and my new groom, Shirley, a sturdy little Berkshire fellow, stood back in the crowd. On the way I heard one bookie calling 3 to 1 bar one, and another 10 to 1 bar two—which "bars" I imagine referred

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to Black and White and the Chestnut. Not a voice was raised for Loppy until Shirley cried out:

"I'll bet 20 to 1 against number eleven," which was our number.

"What does he mean?" I said to Tugby.

"He just wants to encourage the others. Don't you have any fear, sir. Just sit tight and nurse Loppy three-quarters way round. Don't get excited, and hold on in the rear. Then crouch down, dig in your heels, and let Loppy rip. He's all right, sir; never you mind. The best of luck!"

In a moment we were off. Black and White dashed ahead and was clear of his field in a few moments; the Chestnut was a length or so behind, but Loppy, true to popular expectation, was well in the rear. After the first few moments of silence, the shouting started again with renewed vigour.

"Who's the bloke riding the cab-horse?" shouted a Middlesex man in the crowd.

"Why, it's Father Day!" answered a chorus of voices.

"Never!" exclaimed another. "He's riding like Donoghue!"

Shortly after, as we were coming to the last hundred yards or so of the race, and beginning to round the final bend of the course, a little fellow, stretching his neck to get a view of the horses, bawled out:

"It's Chester Cup odds on Black and White," and then started capering. This was too much for me.

"Now or never," I said, and crouching down in the saddle, I dug my heels into Loppy. He understood all right, and we began to pass one horse after another!

We were now racing for the straight run-in to the winning post, a matter of eighty yards at the most, and the excitement reached its height. Loppy, who seemed to have dropped from the clouds, was putting "all in", and had already got ahead of the Chestnut. Next I saw that we were on the flanks of the favourite, and Loppy was creeping to the girth of his rival.

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The shouting became terrific. Another stride, and we were at it neck and neck. Loppy's ears were both down, my teeth were clenched, my arms well forward. Then, with a grand final burst, practically on the post, we won, by the shortest of heads.

Did Loppy really win? Well, as I have said, he got past the post first. But by some unaccountable "accident", of which neither of us was fully conscious in the excitement of the race, but which had been observed and reported, probably by the little man who had bawled out and capered at the corner, we were disqualified after a brief, and, I may say, a very brief investigation by the judges, for having shortened the course by passing on the inside of one of the flag-posts!

No matter, we had got much of our own back and shown what we could do. On returning to the paddock, the "cab-horse" and his "jockey" were received with cheers, which could be heard nearly across Lake Langaza.

With the spring of 1918, I got my third bout of malaria; and on Friday, March 22nd, I proceeded home on the "Y" scheme.

THE SHEPHERD COMES HOME.

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CHAPTER IX

France in 1918—La Bassée—All the best—The Cambrai-Merville Sector — The Major and the air-raid — A terrible tragedy — Failure of German offensive—Australian and Canadian Corps —The black day of the German Army—Marshal Foch—The pathetic ruins of Bethune—I win a race—Hindenburg line—Fascination of the kilt — The Wotan Switch — Within the German lines—St. Quentin—" The Four Last Months "—I lose my voice—November 11th, 1918.

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CHAPTER IX

AFTER a nine days visit to Rome on my way back from Macedonia, and a fortnight's leave in England, I arrived in France on May 7th, 1918.

It was a doubtful experience, after three years' active service with my friends of the Salonika Army, to recommence duty amongst strangers; I admit that I felt some little anxiety in regard to the future, my chief source of fear being lest I might be relegated to the Base on the score of malaria, or kept from the front line through the competition of younger chaplains.

In reality there was no need for any such apprehension. No one questioned my age or my fitness, and there were plenty of vacancies waiting to be filled at the front. On the La Bassée line, the 1st Infantry Division required a Senior R.C. Chaplain; within twenty-four hours of my arrival in the country, it was arranged that I should act in that capacity.

The position was a rather nondescript one, and carried no advancement in rank. In practice, it meant attending to a number of scattered Divisional units, and a little additional work in the way of supervising and organizing services. Needless to say, I readily fell in with the arrangement, and felt proud to be appointed to a Division which had already achieved a splendid record of war service, and was commonly regarded as one of the best in the whole of our armies.

To be tied down to camps behind the line was little to my liking, so I soon began to think out the question of how I might legitimately improve matters and extend my activities.

As Senior R.C. Chaplain, with duties ill-defined, why should I not regard the whole Division as my province, or at least as a sort of general sphere of influence?

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The idea seemed excellent, and I forthwith put it into practice. My new plan was to spend half the week visiting troops in the front line, and the other half attending to those who formed my more immediate charge in their rear.

It worked well both for the men and myself. For them, the extra visits of a priest on the front line often provided a needed opportunity to seek advice or receive the Sacraments; while for myself, these visits were profitable occasions for acquiring fresh experience and knowledge. It was rare that I did not hit on something interesting, or glean information on my rounds concerning our own or the enemy's positions and methods.

The Hohenzollern trenches on our extreme right, with their system of extensive underground communications, constructed by the Germans, which we had captured and occupied, were of special interest to me, and I never tired of exploring them. The journeys to and fro were also frequently attended with risks, which gave the necessary spice of danger to season a life of routine, and so prevent boredom.

My new Division consisted of three Infantry Brigades, each composed of three noted regiments of the line—first battalions in nearly every case. The first Brigade, made up of Cameron Highlanders and Black Watch and a battalion of Loyal North Lancashires, was predominantly a Scottish Brigade. The second and third comprised English and Welsh County Regiments.

Originally there had been four battalions to each Brigade, the first Brigade being made up of two battalions of Guards, together with the 1st Cameron Highlanders and the 1st Black Watch. With the reduction of personnel made some months previously, the Guards were withdrawn to form a separate Division of Guards, and the 1st Loyal North Lancs took their place.

Our G.O.C. was that magnificent soldier, Sir Edward Strickland. He knew, as none other could, the worth of the men of his Division, and he was proud of them, as they were of him. One day, curious to learn his opinion of

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the relative fighting value of the several bodies of troops under his charge, I ventured to put the question:

"Which of these Brigades, may I ask, sir, do you consider the best fighting unit?"

"The best, Padre—they are all the best! In posting them, I have only to consider the particular objective to be attained in any engagement. They are all the best!"

When I joined the Division, and for months after, it occupied the Cambrai-Merville Sector of the La Bassée line on the left of the British front, in the Pas de Calais.

In peace time, this flat low-lying country, with its busy mines, substantial villages, and whole tracts of agricultural land devoted to rich crops of wheat and sugar beet, might have afforded a passably pleasant and interesting scenery. But for the present, all it succeeded in offering eye and imagination was barren and unrelieved monotony.

On a clear day, Vimy Ridge could just be seen in the distance. Here and there along the front, huge slag-heaps, or "fosses", towered against the sky-line. Æsthetically they were a sheer abomination, but militarily they served a useful purpose for the enemy's gunners, who were constantly directing their fire against them, and occasionally dropping shells into the mines through the open pit-shafts on their summits.

This practice made approach to our lines on certain routes more than ordinarily hazardous. Across the trenches was no-man's-land—blasted vegetation, ugly ruins of brick and mortar, fields of craters and shell-holes, utter desolation! Beyond stretched the German front, mostly a replica of our own. I often contrasted in my mind the grandeur and variety of the Macedonian scenery with the monotony and sordidness of this.

Of the townships and villages in our area—Barlin, Maisnil, Maisnil-les-Ruits, Nœux-les-Mines, Sailly-la-Bourse, Annequin-Fosse, where the 23rd (Field) Company R.E. were stationed, and farther back Houdain, where our Corps Headquarters was established—Barlin, situated

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on a main route of traffic, four miles from the front, was by far the largest and most important.

Troops were constantly passing through this town, and many units also were permanently quartered in or round about it. Nearby, in a wood on rising ground to the east, the Division had their headquarters; in another wood to the west, called Olhain, there was a big camp, where the Brigades in the line repaired in turn for rest.

Besides these advantages, Barlin possessed, from my point of view, the further conveniences of a commodious parish church, which was available for services on Sundays, and also on other days of the week, for the Catholic troops in the neighbourhood.

In Barlin accordingly I settled. My first billet was at 33 Rue d'Hersin, a small house at the opposite end of the town to the church, owned and occupied by Madame Gazay, a hard-working, middle-aged widow, with two or three children.

The front parlour had been taken over for an R.A.M.C. officers' mess, while Madame and her family lived in the back. My room was on the first floor, looking out on the main street. Later on I went to reside at the "Vicairie", with Monsieur le Doyen Delohen, the worthy priest of the place.

I began to organize my work at once, always a rather difficult task, as one never knew how long it would be before we moved again! Fortunately the first four months were fairly quiet. It was the period immediately following our push back in the spring, and time was required to recover before the next attempt could be made to advance. This gave me the opportunity I needed to get about and acquaint myself with the troops.

Though, as already stated, risks were plentiful up the line in those days, it was back in the comparative security of this little town that I encountered my first real thrill on the Western Front. The occasion was an enemy bombing raid over our area, on the night of Whitsun Tuesday, May 21st.

It started, as I learned afterwards, at ten-thirty in the

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evening, and lasted till one-thirty the next morning. During this time, serious damage was done in several of the villages. Over Barlin alone twelve bombs were dropped in the course of an hour, with the result that twenty civilians were killed in the town, and many more seriously wounded.

After this, raids began to be frequent, and, during the summer months, we grew to regard them as familiar occurrences, to be expected in the ordinary course on all fine moonlight nights.

At so considerable a distance of time my recollection of most of these raids has become somewhat dim, but this first one, which was particularly severe, has remained with all its circumstances, vividly and indelibly impressed on my memory.

The day had been hot to suffocation; the night was warm and clear. I had returned to my billet in the Rue d'Hersin shortly after ten o'clock. It was now getting on for eleven, and I was preparing to retire to rest. All was comparatively quiet.

Despite the heat, the little French children had ceased playing in the street and gone to bed; whilst their parents, who had been chatting vivaciously through the evening, commenced to disperse and close their doors. The R.A.M.C. officers were busy playing bridge in the mess.

Suddenly I became conscious of renewed noise and excitement outside. The alarm signals had sounded; doors re-opened and shut again; agitated voices were heard, and a hurrying to and fro went on in the street.

As I looked out of my window, I saw the sky brilliantly illuminated. Tracer bullets shot out from all angles, forming streaks and arcs of light which rapidly converged over our locality. On the horizon to the north, rockets and Véry lights added kaleidoscopic effect to an already splendid pyrotechnic display.

Next our Archies opened out, and I could see and hear the shells bursting immediately above us. The R.A.M.C. officers had abandoned their game of bridge, and were in the street just below my window, watching

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the scene. The last word I caught of their conversation, before they hurried inside and slammed the door behind them, was:

"By——, the d——d Boches are right over us!"

A fearful whirring of engines overhead sounded for the next few seconds. Then flash! crash! bang! And every pane of glass was broken in the window of my room, while the floor was littered with debris. The ornaments tumbled from the mantelpiece—and I tumbled into bed!

Darkness and silence fell once more—the stillness only broken by a deadened throb of machinery from above, or cries and sobs of women and children from the basement below. Half a minute later came a yet louder report, and more screams.

Following the instinct of self-preservation, and remembering that I was British, and that a Britisher should show no sign of perturbation, especially amongst foreigners, I remained in bed, comfortably ensconced in the blankets, despite the noise and cries of the inhabitants. After a quarter of an hour the danger seemed to have passed.

Now was the time for neighbourly charity, possibly even for heroism. Accordingly I got out of bed, dressed partially, and walked downstairs with an air of sang-froid. After assuring myself that Madame and her children had only been frightened and were none the worse for it, I went out into the street, to see what damage had been done, and to render such help as I might.

Two bombs of fifty or sixty pounds each had fallen, one in front and one at the back of my billet, making two enormous holes, great craters in the ground. The first bomb, which had broken the windows of my room, had fallen in front of the house, and I measured the distance, approximately a hundred and twenty yards. The one that fell at the back was only eighty yards distant. Many houses nearby were shattered, and several families were homeless. The excitement prevailing was extraordinary, and on every hand I heard expressions of sympathy for neighbours and execration of the enemy.

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"Marie, où es-tu?"

"Oui, Maman, je suis ici, que veux-tu? Ah, ce pauvre Louis, on dit qu'il est mort!"

"Dites donc quoi de neuf, qu'est-ce qui se passe?"

"Vous ne voyez pas, Maman—regardez là bas, voilà la maison du pharmacien presque détruite."

"Epouvantable!" "Quelle misère!" "Sales Boches!" "Là bas l'Allemagne!" were amongst the commonest exclamations; yet more insistent was the great concern expressed for a certain British Major, supposed to have been killed in his bed at the house of the principal apothecary of the town. Women wringing their hands came to me imploringly:

"Allez vite, vite, Monsieur le Curé, chez le pharmacien où Monsieur le Major va mourir parce que la maison de Monsieur l'apothécaire est tout à fait détruite—dépêchez-vous de le sauver!"

"Oui, Monsieur le Curé, une bombe a éclaté en tombant, et il parait que le Major a été tué sur le coup."

"Où est cette maison? J'y vais tout de suite," I kept saying.

"Par ici, monsieur—pas, par là," and at length I was brought to the door.

Part of the house *was* in ruins. I knocked hard, and shouted at the top of my voice:

"What ho! Apothecary!" or words to that effect.

There was no answer, so I pushed open the door and went in. The staircase was partly destroyed, but I managed to climb up to the sleeping apartments; the doors were open and the rooms empty.

At length I came to one closed room at the end of a narrow passage. I listened intently, and stertorous sounds, possibly the moans of a man in his last agony, reached me. . . . It must be the Major; and, alive or dead, I must rescue him. I approached the bed and shook the occupant—it *was* the Major.

"Hello, Major—are you alive or dead?"

The Major opened his eyes.

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"Who the —— are you? Am I alive, d'you say? Can't you see for yourself?"

"Well, you must excuse my putting the question, sir, but the crowd are convinced that you were killed by that bomb."

"What bomb?"

"The one that fell in the raid half an hour ago."

"D—— the raid and the bomb—it would take a lot more of those d—— Hun shells to kill me."

Then turning over in bed, the Major was soon snoring again.

To the crowds waiting outside, I tried to explain matters as best I could.

"Monsieur le Major n'est pas mort—il vit—il dort—comment dit-on il 'snore'?"

I did not say that he "God-damned".

They answered with interjections of surprise, and prayers of thanksgiving.

"Ah, mais c'est impossible! Ce sont des choses extraordinaires!"

"Mais Monsieur le Curé l'a vu."

"Que le bon Dieu est bon!"

. . . . . .

Now for a tragedy of war, which it was never my lot to witness. I have seen many a man killed in action, but never a brave man die the death appointed for cowards. A personal experience of this so despised, yet so heart-rending termination of all a fellow-creature's aspirations is naturally rare and seldom revealed. Yet to know is to understand the deeper woes of war, and no one can read the following narrative, written by my friend, the Reverend R. H. J. Steuart, S.J., without a new sense of the terrible fate which awaits the man who fails to realize to the full the inexorable principles of war.

. . . . . .

My battalion (he writes) was out of the line when the Senior Chaplain called at my billet, one evening, to tell

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me that a man, belonging to another Brigade of my Division, was to be shot next morning for desertion, and that he had asked for a priest. Nothing was farther from my thoughts at the time; it was a possibility that I had sometimes envisaged, but had never really expected to encounter, and when the summons came, I was conscious of a thrill of repugnance.

I found the condemned man in an improvised cell at the A.P.M.'s quarters. He was sitting in a corner, his head bowed on his manacled hands, holding a wretched rag of a handkerchief to his eyes. He was sobbing brokenly, and I confess that the words which had vaguely occurred to me as I hurried along, died on my lips. There was nothing that one could say, just then, which would not have sounded intolerably trivial and intrusive in face of such desolate misery. For a long time I sat silent beside him, the witness of an anguish as mortal as death itself. I kept my eyes on the ground and waited, knowing that, before long, the absolute necessity of human sympathy would force him into speech.

To die amidst the roar and fury of battle is a thing that many men had come hardly to fear, and others almost to desire; but how frightful to be led out, blindfold and bound, in the chill of the morning, and there be silently put to death—the very phrase is a strangling horror in itself!

When at last he spoke, it was in a perfectly dry and steady voice:

"You are a priest?"

"Yes."

"I want to go to Confession."

. . . . . .

Half an hour later I gave him Communion. The law of fasting had been suspended for the troops at the front. He remained for a long time afterwards on his knees; then, after a big Sign of the Cross, he went to the bucket of water that stood by the wall, washed and dried his face,

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and sitting down beside me, began to tell me the story of his disaster.

He was a native of one of the bi-lingual Dominions of the Empire. He was in England when the war broke out, and had joined up at once. He was drafted into a Highland regiment, than which, perhaps, no society could have been more uncongenial to a man of his origin and temperament. Rightly or wrongly, he believed that his comrades laughed at and made a butt of him, chiefly on account of his noticeably foreign accent and unfamiliar ways. He seemed to be rather exceptionally sensitive, and his dread of incurring further ridicule by making mistakes in speech, made him awkward and unready in repartee.

He had really had nothing worse to bear than the usual banter and artless personalities which form the staple of social intercourse in the ranks, but he bore it badly. English was only his second language, and it is a fact that the essential difference between languages resides not in their verbal dissimilarities alone, but also in the widely different connotations of otherwise equivalent terms, so that words which in two languages bear precisely the same *literal* meaning, may often, especially in a metaphorical sense, have quite contrary implications.

Anyhow, he was soon profoundly unhappy, and his one desire, which rapidly became an obsession, was to join the French Army, in which he believed that he would find himself at home. There were insuperable technical difficulties in the way of a legalized transfer, so he resolved to take the matter into his own hands. He deserted, I understood, from a rest camp; was arrested and sentenced to a term of imprisonment, which was, as usual, suspended for the duration of the war. A little later, under much the same circumstances, he deserted again. He was once more arrested and his sentence repeated.

Then he did the unpardonable thing—he deserted from the line, " in face of the enemy ", not, I am convinced, from cowardice, for his whole record showed that he was

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no coward, but under the impulse of his unfortunate obsession. When, after many weeks, he was recaptured, he was found living in a village, wearing civilian clothes. I suppose that nothing could have saved him then. In estimating such a case, one has to think soldier-wise, not as a county-court lawyer. One has to remember, too, the well-known scrupulosity of the Commander-in-Chief in all that concerned the death penalty, and the anxious consideration to which he submitted each case before confirmation.

The man himself, at any rate, had no illusions on the subject. His one complaint, on which, however, he did not seem to insist—for though he mentioned it at the beginning of our conversation, he did not refer to it again —was that some at least of the witnesses against him had been prejudiced.

" I done it," he said, the poor fellow, " but they'd no call to say the things they did."

On my way down from my billet, I had called at the E.F.C. and bought some chocolate, cigarettes, candied fruits, and other things such as I knew the men loved, and these I now laid out on the table. He was very moderate. He smoked three or four cigarettes, and now and then helped himself to a chocolate or one of the other sweets, but he would only take the veriest sip of whisky from my flask.

The sergeant of police looked in from time to time, and, at my request, removed his handcuffs. Eventually, on the invitation of the prisoner, he joined us round the fire, and we sat for a long time exchanging reminiscences of our service. The condemned man spoke without the least restraint, and with no reference at all to his dreadful circumstances. Only once, after describing a narrow escape that he had had from a shell, in the line before Le Sars, he said, " I sure thought it'd got me ! " Then, with a wry smile, he added after a pause, " Perhaps it was better if it had, eh ? "

He spoke of himself with curious detachment, as of one who had lived long ago. After the intimate revela-

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tions of himself of which I had been the recipient, I understood him well enough to know that this was neither artificial, nor the result of natural obtuseness. He had faced, and after the first great agony had fought down, the terror that confronted him. He had received the Sacraments that gave peace and security to his soul, and he was man enough to make little after that of the swift death that awaited his body.

The impression that he made upon me was of a man who looked upon himself as no longer of the world of living men: I thought that, in the intervals of silence, I detected on his face an absent, tense, almost impatient expression, such as a man might wear who is trying to catch a faint, far-away sound.

It was after midnight when at last he consented to lie down, twining his rosary round his wrist. I had a bed beside his. Whether he slept or not I cannot say, but he never moved once all through the night.

Shortly after five, I called him—he was to die at six o'clock.

He dressed in silence, but without the smallest sign of agitation. I remember how careful he was about the adjustment of his puttees. Then he renewed his Confession, and received Communion once more.

After breakfast, he smoked a cigarette, but refused all stimulant, and we remained talking quietly together until the sergeant, as had been arranged, put in his head to warn us that the time was drawing near. He then handed me a letter for his wife, and asked me particularly to remember that, to the best of his belief, he had no debts, and that he bore no grudge to anyone. I knew to what he referred.

A few minutes later, the door opened to admit the A.P.M., accompanied by a medical officer, the prisoner's own Company Sergeant-Major, and three military police. The prisoner came at once to attention and saluted the officers. The Sergeant-Major then formally identified him; the policeman tied a bandage over his eyes and fastened his hands behind him, while the medical officer

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pinned a small square of lint over his heart, to serve as a mark for the firing-party.

Then, with the A.P.M. leading, we went out.

The place of execution was only a few yards away—three sides of a square, solidly built of sand-bags, and in the centre a stout post. I kept my hand upon his arm as we walked, and I can vouch for it that he never faltered nor trembled.

Arrived within the square, he was bound securely to the post, and I had time to hear him make his act of contrition and give him Absolution once more, to put the crucifix to his steady lips, to press his hand in good-bye, and to get "God bless you, Father," from him, before the A.P.M. motioned me to stand aside.

It was a misty morning, and the white fog magnified the sounds that rose from the just-awakened camps about us. Some trucks clanked noisily on a siding below, and there was a stamping of horses and a rattle of chains from the standings across the road above us. Shouts and whistles, and the thousand confused rumours of a busy camp, reached us, and in the distance a mellow baritone voice was singing "The Roses of Picardy".

With these familiar sounds of everyday life in his ears, and the bite of the sharp morning air on his face, in full health and strength and youth, he died.

At a sign from the A.P.M., the firing-party, which up till then had stood with their backs to the condemned man, faced about to him; at a second sign they took aim; at a third they fired, and the bound figure crumpled and slid down as far as the ropes would let him go.

Instantly the officer in command called his men to attention, formed fours, and marched them off; the medical officer, stepping forward to examine the body, reported five bullets through the heart.

The cemetery lay a few hundred yards away, and in less than a quarter of an hour from the time that the dead man and I had sat talking together in the hut, the earth had been pressed down over him in his grave, and I was signing the label for the identifying peg at its head.

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That, and a pool of bright red blood steaming in the hollow of the stretcher, was all the trace that he had left.

He had paid the just penalty of his offence, but I ask no better than that I may meet my death, when I must, as gallantly as did that deserter!

. . . . . .

With the wholly unexpected collapse of the Champagne-Marne attack, on July 15th, and the overwhelming success of the French counter-attack at Soissons on the 18th, the German summer offensive of 1918 had definitely failed, and a new phase of the war in the West had begun, involving a complete reversal of fortune in favour of the Allies.

From now onwards, events of the highest military importance followed in quick succession. Already the Marne area had been evacuated by the enemy; and on August 8th, a most successful attack by the Australian and Canadian Corps, supported by a French Corps on their right and a British Corps on their left, was made against the German salient facing Amiens, with the result that several picked German divisions were virtually annihilated by the Colonials.

The date of this battle of Amiens, in Ludendorf's significant phrase, was "the black day of the German Army in the war". It was followed twelve days later by a further successful attack by the French, which forced the German Army back on Chauny, and later led to their establishing themselves in the strong positions they had held the previous winter in the Alberecht Sector of the Hindenburg line.

The military situation was now such as to enable the Allied Commander-in-Chief to contemplate a definite scheme for penetrating the enemy's line in the North, and driving him out of the country. To effect this, Marshal Foch, after consulting the other Allied Commanders, decided to use the British and American Armies, now complete in man power, and fully equipped with morale,

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as his chief attacking forces. The French had borne the brunt of the recent fighting, and had been bled white in resisting the German offensive, so they were to be spared as much as possible, and reserved for support or lesser engagements.

According to the plan published by the Commander-in-Chief at the beginning of September, two main offensives were to be carried on simultaneously, on different parts of the Northern front, while the French continued to push back the Germans beyond the Aisne and Ailette in the South.

The British, supported on their right by the French Army, were to break through the Hindenburg line in the direction of Cambrai-St. Quentin; while the Americans, to whom a double task was appointed, were to commence by completing the reduction of the St. Mihiel salient. After this, they were to assault the German defence line north of Verdun, and, with the support of the French on their left, to advance in the direction of Mézières. Briefly the plan was to attack the large salient which constituted the German line in Northern France by pinching in its two ends.

Repercussions of the fighting in the South were not slow to make themselves felt right along the line, and as time went on, and the enemy's reverses increased, his bombardments of the Northern sectors became more intense and frequent.

Of the different places in our neighbourhood which suffered from his artillery fire, the small fortified town of Béthune, six miles north-west of us, and the neighbourhood immediately in its rear, came in for by far the worst of the " strafing ".

This was natural enough in view of various circumstances which made it an attractive objective for the enemy. The town was of no great consequence in itself, yet being situated high up on a rock washed by the River Brette, and near the junction of the Lawe and Bassée Canals, which here formed a fine basin, it represented a military position of considerable defensive strength and tactical

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value. Moreover, as the capital of an arrondissement in the department of the Pas de Calais, and having easy access to the Channel Ports, it possessed political and strategical advantages which could not fail to appeal to an invading army.

The most conspicuous object of the town, and a choice target for the enemy's guns, was the ancient belfry—a remarkable structure crowning the fine city square, another side of which was formed by the Hôtel de Ville, also a noble edifice.

The effect of the shelling of the tower was tragic to witness. Each direct hit on the majestic building caused great masses of masonry to collapse and crumble to earth! Day by day, its splendid height visibly shrank, and on Monday, July 22nd, I was informed that the level of the clock in the tower had been reached, and that there would soon be no tower at all.

For weeks past, I had been curiously interested in the fate of the place, and had anxiously watched from the distance its rapid demolition. Accordingly I decided without further delay to see for myself at close quarters what havoc had actually been done.

Sports were to be held that afternoon in Barlin by "D" Company of the 1st M.G.C., to whom I was attached at the time, so I resolved to make a gala day of the occasion by combining with the sports a morning visit, on my Army bicycle, to the doomed city.

Arriving on the high ground above the eastern outskirts of the town, I first caught sight of the splendid basin formed by the two canals, which, in peace time, so much favoured the trade of the place. Farther below, winding on its way to the sea, and partly encircling the town, lay the river. Beyond stretched the German trenches.

At this point of the high ground, I passed a few heavy howitzers and trench-mortars. These were guarded by British pickets, and I felt a little apprehensive for a moment, lest they might stop me. Fortunately they did not, probably being satisfied that I was on some duty.

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There were other more lawful occasions when I wandered into strange sectors, and was halted under suspicion of being a spy.

I arrived in the town to find it uninhabited, the only persons I met being a couple of young French soldiers cycling through. Their haversacks were heavily laden, but they carried no arms, and were making their way back in evident haste.

On what errand had they been? Perhaps, like myself, they had come out of curiosity, or perhaps they were natives of the place and had expected to find relatives still there. Half the houses and shops were destroyed or in ruins, while those that remained more or less intact, had their windows smashed and the doors for the most part wide open. I have a note in my Diary to the effect that there was much loot to be had, including trinkets, watches, and bottles of the best French wines. Having been well brought up as a child, and never allowed to practise total abstinence, my character was fortified against these seductions, and I passed through the way of temptation unscathed.

I had managed to proceed on my "velocipede"—a proud and proper name for what was once the fastest thing on the road, yet a humiliating mount for an ex-Macedonian Cavalry Chaplain—as far as the immediate approach to the city square; but after this the road was too blocked for me to make headway with it. I left the machine on a heap of stones and proceeded on foot into the square.

The once famous "Place" was now a mere waste, strewn with fragments of blown-up buildings and wreckage of every description. It was a sad sight to look upon! As for the ancient belfry, little of it was left. Even the clock had disappeared, and only some twenty feet of the tower remained. Some portions of the front of the Hôtel de Ville still stood, and gave an idea of its former splendour. The inside of the building was entirely gutted.

Standing in the midst of the ruins, I could hear the low booming of the heavy guns in the distance. This low sound was followed by a loud roar as the shells approached

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overhead, and ended with a sudden deafening crash if they hit the town—or else became a whining note which quickly died away as they rushed on in their meteoric flight over the hill-top.

I soon tired of this kind of sight-seeing, and was glad to get out of the place and on to the road, heading for Barlin.

When I arrived on the sports ground at Barlin, the races were about to begin, and half the town, with all the children, was agog to witness the afternoon's entertainment.

The events which I was called upon to enter was the officers' two hundred and twenty yards flat handicap. It was one of the last on the list, and as the handicap was two yards for every year over twenty-five, and I had previously won a similar race with half that allowance in Macedonia, I had no hesitation in subscribing a franc and entering.

As at least fifty ran, and the money was to be divided into three prizes, the event also had the attraction of a good sporting speculation. The first prize was thirty-five francs, and I pulled it off quite easily, winning the race by fifteen yards. The children clapped and screamed with delight, while Monsieur le Doyen, who was present, together with Monsieur le Maire and the Chief Engineer, near the winning post, applauded with a gratifying "abandon" of French enthusiasm. All this, I need hardly say, gave me a pardonable satisfaction.

Captain Lord Leveson-Gower of the Horse Guards, then incorporated with the Machine Gunners, came in second. I was sorry to read of his death abroad a year or two ago. Who the third prize-winner was I have forgotten. No matter, it was an eventful day, and a real gala for me.

Our 1st Division moved from the Cambrai-Merville Sector of the La Bassée line on August 19th, and on the 22nd, I found myself back with the M.G.C., at a village called Eps, some twenty miles south-west of the line.

Our retirement into Army Reserve was not in order to

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rest, but to co-operate with the First British Army, which, reinforced by the Canadian Corps, was to extend yet farther north on a line east of Arras—a projected attack by the Third Army north of the Somme on September 2nd.

This attack was the beginning of the first British offensive, and its immediate result was to compel the whole Northern portion of the German Army to conform with their Southern portion, and fall back on their Siegfried Sector on the north of the Hindenburg line.

My days with the Divisional troops were now drawing to an end, and on the 27th, I received orders to join the Cameron Highlanders at Fiefs, to take charge of the Catholics of the 1st Brigade, who were by far the most numerous of the Division.

To my happiness, and I trust not to their entire dissatisfaction, I remained with this splendid battalion till the end of the war in France, and for some months later in Germany. So long a stay amongst such a fine body of Scottish men, and the glamour of being associated with two splendid Highland regiments—the Black Watch also belonged to the Brigade—might have strained the allegiance due to my own country. But in spite of the great temptation of kilt, tartan and pipes to belong to their noble race, I continued loyal to my proper birthright and remained an Englishman.

The seduction of the kilt, to which I noticed young chaplains from England, despite Army orders, often succumbed in the days after the Armistice in Bonn and Cologne, never seriously tempted me at my age. But I admit that I did yield to some mitigated vanity by occasionally donning their " bonnet ", or furtively wearing a glengarry, tilted at the appropriate angle, and of frequently having had myself photographed in that becoming form of head-dress. The Scotsmen declared that I looked " bonnie " in it; but that raises a question best left to my friends, who can help themselves to a decision by consulting the pen-sketch in this volume, contributed by the Scottish etcher, Mr. Fred A. Farrell of London.

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On the morning of the 31st of August, the battalion received orders to " stand to ", in readiness for a move, and by five o'clock in the afternoon was on the march to Anvin. There we entrained at ten p.m. for Arras, which we reached the next morning (Sunday) at seven. There was no delay, and within two hours of arriving in the place, the battalion had started on its way up the line to Guemappes, leaving me behind, to my annoyance, with " B " Echelon (Transport), on the plain a mile east of the town.

Here we pitched our camp for the night, near one of the famous Pill Boxes.

The battalion reached Guemappes, the place of assembly, at two o'clock the next morning, September 2nd, the day of the battle. Our Division acted as support to the Canadian Corps, the 12th Brigade of which proceeded successfully to its objective. Two platoons of " A " Company of the Camerons filled a gap on the left of the Canadian line, while the rest of the battalion assembled in the rear of the Canadians, who later took up positions in the Queant-Drocourt Sector, known as the Wotan Switch. On the same day, the " B " Echelon proceeded from the Pill Box at Arras to Wancourt.

The next day I went to view the battlefield, over which the Canadians and Somersets of the 4th Infantry Division on our left had advanced the previous day.

The open ground had been cleared of the dead, but in a sunken road on the way I came across some hundreds of corpses of young German soldiers, many mere boys, scattered along a quarter of a mile of the track. Beside one poor fellow, whose body was burnt to a cinder, were a number of empty petrol tins. It was a dreadful sight, and raised the same pity in me as if they had been our own dead. Brave boys! They had done their bit, and, please God, they received their reward when they met Him.

On my return to the position of the Pill Box where I had left the Transport in the morning, I found that they had gone to Bergères, a place off the Cambrai road in

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the vicinity of Monchy. Divisional Headquarters had also advanced to the same place.

Following up the rear of a victorious army was not really exhilarating; and as soon as I knew my way about, and was sufficiently acquainted with the front line, I determined to get there and remain in it. So, before the week was out, on Thursday the 6th—set down in my Diary as " fine and warm " and thus probably encouraging—I visited Colonel McCall, whom I had previously known in Macedonia, and who now commanded the Camerons.

I found him at Battalion Headquarters, a deep narrow " dug-out ", recently occupied by the Germans, in the Drocourt-Queant Sector of the support line near Durg.

" Padre, I would love to have you with us, but, as you see for yourself, there is not room for another officer. Every berth is booked."

" Very well," I said, " I can sleep on the floor "—and on the floor that night I slept.

Returning immediately to Transport, I gathered the few things I should require up the line, and returned to Battalion Headquarters to stay. The Camerons had lent me a Scottish boy, Private Austin, in place of my old servant, Tugby, who was on sick leave in England. He was a nice young fellow, and had only been with me a fortnight. He wanted to accompany me up the line, but as he had met with a slight injury, and I had no need of a servant, being without any " kit " to speak of, I advised him to remain behind for that night, and follow on, if able to do so, with the Transport party on the following day.

The next evening the Transport Officer arrived late, and reported a gruelling time on the road. They had been heavily shelled throughout the last part of the journey, and a number of men and mules had been killed. Immediately I grew anxious, and inquired after my henchman.

" What about Private Austin? Was he with you? "

" Yes, but I'm afraid, Padre, you will have to get on without him."

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I understood and realized that the poor boy was killed. But how he had been killed none could tell me precisely. He was marching on the road immediately in front of the "Cooker", which was being drawn by mules, when a shell exploded behind it, and the animals bolted. He was last seen running, in order to get out of the way, and whether he was killed by a shell or run over by the heavy machine was not clear. They could not find his body, and he was amongst those reported missing.

The next morning I spent hours searching for the poor boy, and returned again and again in the hope of getting some clue to his fate. But all was of no avail, and I could only feel sorry that I had ever given my consent to his coming up the line. After this I never allowed any of my servants to come up with me.

On September 13th, our 1st Division, having been relieved on the 8th by the 56th Infantry Division, crossed the Somme at Brie, and took over a new portion of the front line, between Holnan Wood and Vermand, in the Fourth Army area, eighty miles south-east of Arras.

Here, for the next few days, the Division was occupied in gaining ground, in order to secure a suitable "jumping off" line for a big attack soon to be launched from the Gouzaincourt-Gricourt Sector.

The attack, which ended successfully on the night of the 22nd, began early in the morning of the 18th, when our 1st Brigade started to advance on the right. "C" and "D" Companies of the Camerons, followed by Battalion Headquarters, soon reached their first objective, and a few hours later the whole battalion was comfortably, and to all appearances securely, established in the enemy's trenches, eight miles farther on, east of Veterni.

Unknown to us, however, the 1st Loyal North Lancs had been held up by some opposition on our right, thus exposing our flank.

We had just settled down to lunch in our headquarters "dug-out", thirty feet below the ground, when a Cameron in hot haste climbed down the ladder, and addressing the O.C. in broad Scotch, said that the Germans were steal-

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ing along the trench and were within a couple of hundred yards of the "dug-out". The men, he said, wanted to know what to do!

"What to do! What are they here to do? Drive the —— out, of course, and be d—— quick about it!" was Colonel McCall's laconic reply.

We were all soon on the spot, and I arrived just in time to see the last of the bombing, and witness the speedy retreat of our unwelcome visitors.

That night in the "dug-out", I overheard the plans of an attack to be made the next day by the Black Watch, together with a company of Camerons, in order to straighten out the line.

I decided to join the attacking party, and, equipped with the necessary knowledge, I started off in the early forenoon of the following day for the place of assembly, a mile and a half to the right of our position.

The company of Camerons occupied the first section of a trench leading down to a road, and beyond them were the Black Watch, with three platoons of "C" Company formed up in a ditch across the road. I passed on to the farthest party, and no sooner had I joined them and got chatting with the men, than they told me that we were surrounded. In the hope of getting reassuring information, I went off and consulted each of the platoon leaders. They satisfied me that all was right.

"Everything is all right," I said to the men; "I have just inquired from the officers."

"Those young officers know naething about it—we are all done in, and there's nae doot o' that."

After a few minutes of suspense, the senior officer gave the order to advance, and scrambled to the top of the ditch. Others followed him, and the first line fell back, killed and wounded into the ditch. The young officer who gave the order was the first to be killed, and one of his colleagues was shot a minute later. The third officer had crossed the road to give information to the company in the trench adjoining.

By now machine-guns were firing from our front and

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from our rear, while a gun a hundred yards up covered the road. Next, the Germans were throwing hand-grenades amongst us, and men began to fall by my side. There was a stampede for the road, but all who attempted to cross were shot down.

"Shall we hoist a handkerchief on a bayonet?" I was asked by a party of the poor fellows.

"No," I said, because I knew that would mean surrender and imprisonment, and the end of the war in France for me, just when I was beginning to enjoy it.

Then they put their heads together, and suggested firing off an S.O.S. I agreed to this, not knowing what the result might be. The signal rocket was fired, but luckily did not go off, a pin not having been removed. I was afterwards told that, if it had gone off, we should have drawn the fire of our own guns to the spot. Meanwhile, with the help of another man, I dragged a poor wounded private through the mire and blood of the ditch, as far as the roadside.

"Will you venture across with us?" I said.

"No," he muttered, "leave me here."

What the man who was helping me did I do not know, but I sprang across the road and tumbled head over heels into our trenches. Luckily the machine-gun had just been put out of action! Thirty-four of us escaped out of ninety, and Private McDonald, the soldier I had tried to rescue, came along in the evening on a stretcher.

I asked him what had happened afterwards, and he told me that, within a few minutes of our leaving him, the Germans came along and treated him and the other wounded men ever so decently, binding up their wounds and giving them cigarettes. It transpired afterwards that a blunder had been made, and that the assembly point chosen was actually within the enemy lines!

On September 26th, the final Allied offensive opened in the south with a preliminary attack by General Pershing's American Army, and General Gouraud's Third French Army, on the Verdun and Champagne fronts.

This attack was followed the next day by another on

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the northern side of the bulge in the direction of Cambrai, in which the British Third and First Armies, including the Canadian Corps, advanced some distance on a front of thirteen miles.

On September 28th, the Belgians, supported by a French Army under Degoutte, and the British Army under Plumer, also attacked the line from the coast southward beyond Ypres.

The big battle, however, began on the 29th, when General Rawlinson's Fourth Army, with the IXth British Corps, the IInd American Corps, and the Australian Corps in support—after a heavy bombardment lasting two days—attacked the St. Quentin Sector of the Siegfried system, the deepest of the enemy's defences and the very heart of the Hindenburg line.

Two corps of the Third British Army on our left extended the attack of the Fourth Army, which was made on a twelve-mile front, as far north as the loop in the St. Quentin Canal at Marcoing, while General Debeney's Army on our right carried the battle line some miles farther south.

The two British attacks were made against the enemy's most strongly organized positions, and the best of his remaining troops. Yet the victory was complete for the Allies, and the German Army was forced to retire with heavy losses.

This attack of the 29th proved the decisive battle in the great offensive begun on the 26th, and was marked by some of the most glorious military feats of the war.

In the first day's fighting, the 46th North Midland Territorial Division on our left captured over four thousand prisoners, and seventy guns; and, though our 1st Division on the right of the Fourth Army was somewhat retarded by having to maintain communications with the French, it succeeded in making considerable progress, and by the evening of the 30th had gained possession of the Le Tronquoi Tunnel, and crossed the canal to the north of St. Quentin.

This feat has been described by Major-General Sir

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F. Maurice, in his "Four Last Months", as no less splendid than that of the 46th Division on the previous day.

On September 30th and the following days, the Germans were driven back on the whole front by the First, Third, and Fourth British Armies; and by October 3rd, the entire line of the canal, with the renowned Hindenburg defences behind it, was in our hands. The enemy's power of resistance was now broken, and the yielding German Army commenced to retreat along the whole Northern line, until it reached its former starting point at Mons, on November 11th, the date of the Armistice.

From now until the end of the war, we continued to drive the enemy eastwards. Each morning saw a renewal of battle and each evening a fresh advance. In these days, except for the fine resistance of November 4th and 5th, there was little serious opposition from the infantry, the bulk of the enemy's defensive operations being left to his artillery and machine gunners. Of the courage and tenacity of these men it is impossible to speak too highly. Wherever we passed their guns, the gunners lay dead in groups beside them—like the Spartans of Thermopylæ, they guarded the retreat of their comrades to the end, with their lives.

On Wednesday, October 16th, the Division reached the town of Bohain, which had been occupied for four years by the Germans, and only recaptured a week previously by the British.

The surrounding country, fertile and well cultivated, formed a pleasing contrast to the miles and miles of war-stricken wastes through which we had been advancing. The town itself was only slightly damaged, and such damage as had been done was due to our own guns, which had continued to shell the place for five days after its evacuation by the enemy. Notwithstanding this unfortunate mistake, the inhabitants showed us the utmost cordiality.

On the next day, Thursday the 17th, the battle of the

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Selle River commenced at Le Cateau, a few miles south, with an attack by our 4th and 6th Divisions, assisted by patrols of cavalry and tanks.

The attack of the two Divisions started under cover of a heavy barrage at five-twenty a.m.; the 1st and 2nd Brigades of our 1st Division were to pass through the first wave two hours later, but were held up by thick mist, smoke and gas, which caused considerable delay and confusion.

To the best of my recollection, we did not succeed in getting through till the next day, though all Thursday we were on the fringe of the fighting. At about ten o'clock, I was endeavouring to get in touch with one of the Cameron companies in advance of our headquarters, and was overtaken by a detachment of tanks, evidently going into action.

"Where are you going to?" I shouted.

"To hell!" was the reply.

"Very well, I will go with you!"

After that I did my best to follow them, but having a recurrence of malaria and a high temperature, I soon had to give up the attempt, and fall back on headquarters.

For hours we tramped over hill and dale, resting for ten minutes at a time, when I would lie down and try to sleep. At three o'clock in the afternoon, a terrible bombardment caught us in the open, and we fled across to a sunken road near by, getting the best cover we could on the reverse slope of the hill. There, as we lay crouching on the ground, the shells fell on the road and on each side of it, and I could feel the earth repeatedly tremble with the shock. Meanwhile we awaited events, chatting and smoking cigarettes.

When the shelling died down, Lieutenant-Colonel Methuen—who was acting in place of Colonel McCall, recently recalled to England—gave the order to retire. At once there was a general helter-skelter to a position a mile farther back. To my surprise I found that I could run with the best, and when I took my temperature it

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was normal—every trace of malaria was gone! That night I slept soundly in the open.

The next day, the Camerons and Black Watch went on and captured Wassigny. The saddest recollection I have of Thursday was the loss of my dear young friend, Lieutenant Maxwell, who was acting Adjutant in place of Captain J. Robertson, away on leave. I saw him off on the stretcher as he passed by the sunken road below me.

"I do not want to die yet—do you think I am going to?"

"No; and we don't want to lose you," I said. "You will be back in a few days. Good-bye."

The next day I heard that he died the same night.

That day's advance cost us a hundred casualties in the Camerons, and eight officers. All I caught was a bit of shrapnel through my "Cording" overcoat.

By Friday the 25th, we were in the neighbourhood of Catillon, a long straggling town, part of which was occupied by the enemy outposts. In the course of the morning, I took it into my head to walk over and explore the place, carrying in my haversack a bottle of "Bass" and some sandwiches.

On the way, I met General Strickland, who remarked, "Be Careful, Padre! If the Boches know what you have in your haversack, you will have the whole army on your track."

I ate my lunch in a great house formerly owned by a M. Basquin. The place was utterly derelict—furniture, books and papers lay scattered in disorder in every room. Nobody molested me, and I returned in safety, though I had passed over fields saturated with "blue" gas, which, days afterwards, caused me to lose my voice, so that for long I was unable to speak even in a whisper.

In this condition of voicelessness I still found myself on the morning of November 4th, when the First, Third, and Fourth British Armies, with the First French Army on their right, started a great advance on a line of thirty-seven miles.

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Our 1st and 2nd Brigades crossed the Sambre-et-Oise Canal on a series of bridges brought up overnight from Catillon by the 23rd and Lowland (Field) Companies of Engineers, under the direction of Lieutenant-Colonel C. E. P. Sankey, D.S.O., and laid across the canal at different points in the early morning.

At dawn, the R.E.'s were the first to cross, under heavy fire, displaying, in several instances, extraordinary gallantry, Major Findlay, who commanded the Lowland Field Company, gaining the V.C. The Cameron Companies and Headquarters followed them at "2" Crossing.

We were now on the heels of the Germans, and as we passed through their camps, I fear that some of us were guilty of "winning" souvenirs, such as boxes of cigars, sniping revolvers, and so on. By ten o'clock I found myself rather heavily laden, with "C" Company of the Camerons advancing to their final objective.

We had just captured twenty Germans whom we found behind a hedge, when shells began to drop in front of us, though they seemed to come from behind. They were killing our men right and left, and I ventured to expostulate with the young officer in charge.

"We are too forward—these are our own shells."

"No, Padre, nothing of the sort."

The next moment a shell fell in the midst of a group of us, killing four men, and robbing a fifth poor fellow of a leg. I remember taking a hop, skip and jump into a shell-hole, conscious that I was hit, but convinced that it was not serious. Whom should I meet in the shell-hole but the young officer.

"We are too far forward," I said again, and this time he replied:

"Yes, by jove, Padre, you're right!"

I held on for some time in the hope of seeing the last of the fighting, but after a while had to walk back. My servant accompanied me, and we picked up another Cameron badly wounded, and bleeding terribly.

Whenever I saw R.A.M.C. men, I kept inquiring

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where their M.O.'s and aid-posts were. As these orderlies never knew, naturally enough, with an army in movement, I became pretty angry and shouted at them.

When at length we reached a Field Hospital towards evening, my servant reminded me that I had recovered my voice, and had been talking volubly since the morning!

In the early hours of November 11th, when lying in the London Officers' Hospital, at 26 Eccleston Square, I was awakened from sleep by noise and shouts in the streets. The Armistice rejoicings had begun!

Frankly, I was disappointed, believing that the peace was premature. Whether it was so or not, is better left to the impartial verdict of history, which will also judge the larger and moral issue of the Great War as a whole.

Probably this last war was more terrible, and more full of hardships and horrors than any previously waged between civilized nations; but to regard it merely from this ugly side, and in the spirit of the present-day exaggerated pacificism, is to insult the anguish and suffering of all who shared in it.

While withholding our final judgment, we shall do well to remember that war, like peace, is not an end in itself, but a means to an end; and that while it necessarily carries calamities, it may also bear blessings which more than compensate.

The object of war should be to secure freedom or moral right, not to inflict damage and physical hurt. To focus on these incidental evils as the sole realities of war, and to sentimentalize unduly in their regard, is to lose the larger vision and to commit moral cowardice.

The highest idealism is the conception of real truth, rising superior to shallow sentiment. *Unjust* warfare is a form of savagery, unworthy of man, and condemned as immoral by the whole tradition of Christian teaching. But *war in itself*, as distinguished from mere brute contention, is *not* immoral; it may indeed be noblest virtue. There are goods greater than life—there are evils worse than death!

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Three weeks after the Armistice, I returned to my Division, and spent the next eight months—a period full of interest and incident—in Germany with the Army of Occupation on the Rhine. Here I made friends with several officers in the Air Force who enabled me to add to my varied experiences on land and sea a third dimension in the world of adventure. Of this I could relate further thrills equal to, if not surpassing, those already described in Egypt, Gallipoli, Macedonia and France. But enough!

Kind, gentle, patient reader, farewell!

DAYS PAST AND PRESENT.

"WELL—THEY SAID I LOOKED BONNIE."

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